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LORETO COLLEGE KOLKATA
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SUMITA BANERJEE
December 2020

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Introduction

"Come By, Come Buy"—this has been the incessant, incantatory cry of the supernatural writers offering their macabre merchandise to unsuspecting, restless readers. The Bible warns us that the house of the wicked will be destroyed and the tent of the upright will flourish! For me the writer of the eerie stuff just sets up his tent in a *Wood Beyond the Ordinary World* specifically because he has the ability to see in a Tolkien like manner 'through the brick wall in time.' In the manner of a C. S. Lewis he provides plenty of pools cum portals into the preternatural; where we are supposed to deep dive into the depths of the unearthly to discover the lair of a Grendel's dam or that of a poison emitting Kaliya Naga. And as exemplified in *The Magician's Nephew* the end of this supernatural narrative is accompanied by the drying up of these pellucid portals of strange realms.

With this demolition of the haunted house of horrors, the ruin and the rust, the dust and the debris of the graveyard is piled high on the spooky paths of these texts. With their ominous entries the Witch of Endor, Grendel, Dracula and Frankenstein crowd the lanes of these narratives of the menacing and the mysterious. Like the green branches carried by the young virgin soldiers to vanquish the monster, Macbeth haunting his blood-stained castle, the writers of the supernatural employ their own emerald light to vanquish the darkness and the demons they had previously let loose. These texts turn out to be a curious combination of the celebrations of Halloween and the Deepavali—all rolled into one. Often the writers actually establish the ghost only to shrink it, return the world from the foul and the foggy state to the fair and the green one.

Indeed, along with the elves, fairies, ghosts, witches, werewolves, vampires, zombies, the *rakshasis, daityas* and the *betals* are also creatures creeping out of our own bubbling mindscapes and these

authors of the ominous simply turn out to be the facilitators who hold up their lamps to reveal the monsters which march across the icy caves of our subterranean mindsets. And occasionally reveal in this strange realm of thunder, lightning and rain of our existence, a cheerful Casper or an obliging genie or two. Today supernatural literature cannot be dismissed simply as fleurs du Mal; from angel romances to vampire love narratives, from Gothic misadventures to werewolf transformations—here is a bizarre breeding ground of the fantastic, a haunting harvest of temptations and the tempted.

In our publication we have accommodated discussions on a wide variety of the incredible—ranging from the Anglo-Saxon elves of the hoary past to the modern preoccupation with the spectres who walk the talk in the urban jungles of the necropolis. The articles have been arranged in a chronological fashion; the erudite discussion on the elves occupying the pages of the Old English Leechbooks is followed by the insightful paper on the fairy supernatural of the Medieval tradition. Scholarly deliberations on the Renaissance obsession with witchcraft are followed by a perceptive meditation on the Victorian supernatural—on the spectropoetics of Gothic Marxism.

The American absorption in vampires and the undead have also been included here. It is the need of the hour today to align the global with the local; to analyse the literatures of the uncanny both from the West as well as the East. The popular Bengali engrossment with the *bhut* or the ghost and the *rakshasi* of the Bengali fairy tale have also not been ignored. We have three sensitive explorations of the regional supernatural in this issue. Two earnest student responses—one on the miracles of the New Testament and another on John Donne's plague—have also been accepted for publication. The concluding contribution is an illuminating interview of S. T. Joshi, the celebrated and unquestioned expert on H. P. Lovecraft.

Lovecraft, the somewhat neglected American exponent of the weird and horror narrative, certainly deserves a greater publicity and attention from the academic researchers today. This interview is,

again, a student initiative. Thus here, indeed, is the tempting plenty, a veritable Goblin Market of the supernatural sort.

This singular year of the pandemic has been witness to the birth of a new genre of the supernatural—*Quar Horror*. The latest to arrive on the scene and on our screens is all about the horrors associated with the Covid-19 quarantine. In the film *Host* (2020), shot remotely for three months, the director Rob Savage uses a normal Zoom meeting to unleash his brand of the eerie and the unearthly. A demon is released in the course of a 'safe' Zoom meeting and terrible deaths and devastation follow. This irrational horror that now haunts the housebound under quarantine must soon be shown the door and the paranoid offered the psychoanalyst's couch. From its projection on the screen, Quar Horror must now be dealt with on the page. Once this text of the upright is set up and Quar Horror tackled, let us hope that all will be right with our weird world, at least as right as it can possibly be under these 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confined' circumstances; it is important for our mental wellbeing. I can only hope another issue on the supernatural somewhere will deal with this new offspring of the uncanny—the Quarantine Horror, thus ensuring our release when we are completely 'bound in/To saucy doubts and fears.'

SUMITA BANERJEE
December 2020

Contents

Ælf, Ælfsīden, Ælfādl, Ælfsogoþa: Elves and Disease in Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks

MARTINA LAMBERTI

MAGIC AND MEDICINE IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

From the Latin *super-naturalis*, indicating "beyond nature" or "beyond God", the supernatural and, more precisely, demons, monsters, ghosts, dragons, elves, and many other uncanny creatures considered as such, have found a wide expression in our collective imagination, thanks to the huge literary and cinematographic repertoire. Even if the representation of strange creatures has predominated starting from the 19th century, actually the supernatural sphere finds its roots in the ancient times, namely the medieval era, when beliefs in magical beings and superstitious practices were widely spread among the tribes.[1]

In the context of Anglo-Saxon England, and especially in the field of medicine, the presence of supernatural beings, considering the heathen past of the territory, was particularly frequent when it came to healing illness or justifying divine punishment.[2] People of the period created and practised remedies for various ailments.[3] In general, during the Middle Ages, there was no distinction between medical and magical practices, because these shared a common purpose: the resolution of a problem. For this reason, medieval medicine was practised by people in different professions: there were sorcerers, witches, thaumaturgists, necromancers, but there was also a particular figure, the so-called *læce*, a sort of doctor or physician in medieval England. Moreover, the Old English word referring to "medicine" was *lǽcedom,* derived from *læce* and translated by Cockayne[4] as "leechdom".[5]

What are the origins of Anglo-Saxon medicine? The medical practices of that period in England were greatly influenced by the Germanic past on the one hand and by classical medicine on the other, thanks to Christianization. Among the factors contributing to the rise of Anglo-Saxon magic, Payne mentions:

> 1. A herbal medicine founded on a wide knowledge of native plants and garden herbs, which was an original achievement of the Anglo-Saxon leeches, and only in part derived from Latin or other books.
> 2. A body of doctrine derived from classical medicine, chiefly from Latin translations of Greek authors, but not always traceable to its original source.
> [...]
> 4. A superstitious element, consisting of charms and superstitious rites connected with medicine [...] an indeterminate amount that may represent Teutonic and Celtic folklore.[6]

Consequently, it is necessary to bear in mind that the Germanic heathen roots of the Anglo-Saxons continued to survive simultaneously with Christian ideas: the result was a mixture of classical medical doctrines and pagan superstitious beliefs, such as the conception of the demoniac attacks and elf-shot as the causes of disease.[7] Accordingly, the idea of disease was connected sometimes to the doctrine of the four humours,[8] sometimes to the intrusion of supernatural creatures, or even to divine intervention because of sin. To heal any illness, the Anglo-Saxon *læce* could apply an herbal remedy, could make an amulet or could recite a charm, and this would explain the presence of some spells among the remedies in Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts.[9]

ANGLO-SAXON MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS:
Royal 12.D.XVII and Harley 585

What remains of Anglo-Saxon medical knowledge and practices are some compilations of texts, some fragments like the Wellcome fragment, and some marginalia, whose purpose was to offer support to the treatment of diseases by resorting to the botanical and herbal practices of the time. Specifically, the corpus of Anglo-Saxon medical expertise includes four collections of medical texts and remedies, transmitted in two manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London: codex Royal 12.D.XVII and codex Harley 585.[10] These are known as *Bald's Leechbook, Leechbook III, Lacnunga* and the *Old English Pharmacopoeia*,[11] but only the first three will be considered for analysis because of their references to elves.

Royal 12.D.XVII: Bald's Leechbook

The codex known as London, British Library, Royal 12.D.XVII, was written in a continuous hand probably in the scriptorium of Winchester around the 10th century. The manuscript consists of 128 folios of medieval parchment measuring 270×205 mm, containing medical texts and charms in Old English. There are some added inscriptions in Latin which seem to belong to a later date, probably to the 12th or 13th century.[12]

Bald's Leechbook[13] occurs in the ff. 1r-111r and it includes a number of remedies not always of a medical nature; the presence of some prayers and Biblical fragments is significant because it relates to the healing power of God. The work consists of two books, each beginning with a table of contents: Book I (ff. 1r-64v) deals with the treatment of internal diseases almost following *a capite ad calcem* order,[14] while Book II (ff. 65r-111r) focuses first on general anatomical structures and then on external illnesses.[15]

According to Talbot and Cameron, the primary source for these two Leechbooks is the Salernitan compilation *Passionarius*[16] but, some other influences have been identified in *Physica Plinii*, Oribasius, Pseudo-Antonius Musa, Celsus and the late Latin translations of Soranus of Ephesus, namely Esculapii and *Liber Aurelii*. Moreover, other sources for Book II are the Pseudo-Galenic *Liber Tertius* and the Latin *Practica Alexandri*.[17]

Bald's Leechbook ends with a Latin colophon in six verses, from which it is known that the manuscript was compiled by the scribe "Cild" for a certain "Bald",[18] the owner of the book, and from which, consequently, it derives its name:

> Bald habet hunc librum Cild quern conscribere iussit,
> hic precor assidue cunctis in nomine Cristi
> Quo nullus tollat hunc librum perfidus a me
> Nec ui necfurto nec quodam famine falso.
> Cur? Quia nulla mihi tam cara est optima gaza
> Quam cari libri quos Cristi gratis comi.[19]

Royal 12.D.XVII: Leechbook III

In the same manuscript, after the colophon, *Leechbook III* (ff. 111r-127r) begins with a table of contents. The repetition of some textual material between the first two books of Bald and the third Leechbook highlights the possibility that the works were originally conceived as two different compilations, probably drawing from the same sources, then copied by another scribe in this manuscript. Leechbook III contains 73 chapters and it is structured like both Book I and Book II.[20]

Harley 585: Lacnunga

Harley 585 is a parchment codex of unknown provenance, dating

back to the 10th or 11th century, consisting of 194 folios measuring 192x115 mm. It is bound in red with the title Anglo-Saxon Charms and Receipts.[21] It is the oldest manuscript witness for the *Old English Herbal* (ff. 1r-129v) and it also includes two other significant medical works, namely the Anglo-Saxon translation of *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* (ff. 101v-114v) and *Lacnunga* (ff. 130r-193r). From a palaeographical point of view, the manuscript is written in a "rough square Anglo-Saxon minuscule", hence it was conceived for practical work.[22]

Lacnunga, literally meaning 'remedies', is a compilation of almost two hundreds prescriptions, recipes, prose and metrical charms mainly in Old English but also including Latin invocations, and Old Irish and Old French attestations.[23] The work has been divided into two sections because of the different periods of compilation: the first section (ff. 130r-179r) dates back to the late 10th century, the second section (ff. 179v-193r) dates back to the early 11th century.[24]

The remedies are mostly herbal lotions, drinks, and syrups, addressed to the cure of health problems and disorders, often obtained through the use of animal substances and inspired by the teachings of classical sources, some of which are shared with *Bald's Leechbook*.[25] Ten sources have been identified for the texts comprising the compilation: Pliny's *Historia Naturalis, Medicina Plinii, Physica Plinii*, Marcellus' *De Medicamentis Liber*, Pseudo-Apuleius' *Herbarium*, Sextus Placitus' *Medicina ex Animalibus, Practica Alexandri Latine, De minutione sanguinis, sive de phlebotomia, Virtutes Iohannis,* Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*.[26]

Among the recipes, which generally are very short, there is a series of alliterative charms, for which critics described the content of *Lacnunga* as "Semi-Pagan" or as "folk medicine". Actually, the compilation cannot be entirely defined as "pagan" because some charms contains Christian references but mostly, disease in *Lacnunga* is conceived as a problem caused by supernatural creatures: dwarfs, worms, demons, dragons and elves.[27]

CONTEXTUALIZING ELVES IN GERMANIC LITERATURE

Generally depicted as human-like creatures, with pointed ears, white skin and extraordinary powers, elves have always been very popular in literature[28] and their conception has changed over the years, from being associated with deities and monsters to being compared to other creatures like nymphs, fairies, leprechauns and sprites.

Apart from the many attestations of the word "elf" in the context of toponymy and onomastics,[29] the more ancient witnesses of the word "elf" seem to point a Germanic root. From Proto-Indo-European **albh-* and Proto-Germanic **albiz*, the word "elf" came to designate over the centuries supernatural figures like sprites, fairies, goblins and incubi.[30] Grimm mainly relates the word to the Latin *albus,* meaning "white", and to the Old Irish *ailbhín*, meaning "flock", hence associating the ancient root of "elf" with whiteness.[31] The Old English word for "elf", *ælf*, also translated as "nightmare" and it acquired many forms in the dialects,[32] while in the other Germanic languages it is possible to recognise *álfr* in Old Norse and *alpî* in Old High German.[33]

In the context of Germanic literary tradition, the connotation of these creatures varies considerably from text to text. Starting from the Old Norse texts, where a wide range of attestations can be found and a more positive view of these supernatural beings emerges, elves seem to be associated with light and beauty, and put on the level of the divinities belonging to the Germanic pantheon.[34] *Snorra Edda*,[35] a treatise about Norse mythology compiled by Snorri Sturluson, is one of the north Germanic works in which a considerable portion of attestations of "elf" occurs. The word *álfr* appears in compounds in *Gylfaginning,* predominantly when Gilfi, describing the beautiful places, mentions *Álfheimr*, a place where *ljósálfar* "light elves" and *døkkálfar* "dark elves" live.[36] In *Skáldskaparmál, álfr* is associated with light mainly when the kenning *álfrǫðull* is used to describe the

sun.[37] Around the same period, Snorri composed the *Ynglinga Saga*, the opening part of the history of the kings of Norway (known as *Heimskringla*), in which the word *álfr* appears in the epithet "Óláfr" meaning "extremely beautiful."[38]

Turning to the poetic *Edda*, the instances of *álfr* are all related to the beauty and divinity of elves. *Vǫlundarkviða* is the only poem where *álfr* refers to elves as a people: Vǫlundr, whose neck is white and beautiful, is the only character identified as an *álfa lióði* "member of elves" and as *vísi álfa* "wise/leader of elves".[39] In *Hávamál* and *Lokasenna*, elves are placed in the pantheon, juxtaposed to *ása* "æsir".[40]

With regard to Skaldic poetry, the word *álfr* is often associated with kennings referring to warriors. An example is the work of Bragi Boddason,[41] where the king Jǫrmunrekr is called *sóknar álfr* "elf of attack" and the hero Hǫgni is defined as *raðaralfr* "elf of ships".[42]

In Anglo-Saxon glossaries,[43] several instances of *ælfe* further underline the conception of elves as beautiful creatures. Some glosses[44] in the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville parallel nymphs with elves.[45] Another witness of this parallelism is found in the Cleopatra Glossary, in Aldhelm's *Carmen de Virginitate*, where there is mention of *landælfe* and *dūnælfe*.[46]

Further, a frequent use of the adjective *ælfscȳne* is attested in Old English poetry and particularly in *Judith* and *Genesis A*. The adjective underlines a connection with beauty and seductiveness, indicating "beautiful like an elf" or "of elfin beauty". In *Genesis A* the adjective is used to refer to Sarah, Abraham's wife, defined *mæg ælfscīeno* "beautiful wife" (v. 1827a and v. 2731a).[47] In *Judith, ides ælfscīnu* "beautiful lady" (v. 12-14) is used to describe Judith on the divine mission to seduce Holofernes, hence stressing the conception of both angelic and seductive beauty.[48]

It is in *Beowulf,* that the figure of elves is mentioned among the monsters. In the section concerning Grendel's origins (v. 102-114),[49] elves are included among the *untȳdras* "misgotten beings": *eotenas*

ond ylfe ond orcneas / swylce gīgantas "monsters and elves and sea-monsters / likewise giants".

ÆLFSĪDEN: ELFISH ASSAULTS

Starting from the idea expressed in *Beowulf*, it is quite understandable that in Anglo-Saxon England, elves began to be regarded as dangerous creatures on the same level of monsters, threatening human safety and health. This view is reflected in some medical texts used for treating physical assaults or psychological manipulations, marked by a term defining this type of danger: *ælfsīden* "magic of elves". *Sīden* only occurs in this compound, and it is likely that the closest cognate is the Old Norse *síða*, a strong verb meaning "to work magic", stemming from the Proto-Germanic **sīþanam*.[50] The issue of *ælfsīden* is mentioned in different remedies, namely the ones in *Bald's Leechbook I* (section 64), *Leechbook III* (section 41), and *Lacnunga* (section 29).

On folios 120v-121r of *Leechbook III*, the second remedy of section 41 is addressed to *ælcre feondes costunga 7 ælfsīdenne 7 lenctenādle*.[51] The association of *ælfsīden* with fever seems to involve a mental alteration or a "mind-altering affliction".[52] According to Hall:

> *yrc gōde sealfe* associates *ælfsīden* both with diabolical malice and fevers, but it is not necessarily identical with either. Wider evidence, however, does consolidate the remedy's implication that *ælfe* might be associated with causing delusion or hallucination characteristic of fever.[53]

Moreover, Hall finds interesting the association of *ælfsīden* with *lenctenādle* and, above all, with *feondes costunga*, because it underlines the devilish nature of elves.[54] A similar type of remedy is found in *Lacnunga*, section 29, *wið ælfsīdene 7 wið eallum fēondes costungum*[55]

and in *Bald's Leechbook I*, section 64, against *ælcre lēodrūnan 7 ælfesīdenne*.[56]

In section 65 (folios 107v-108r) of *Bald's Leechbook II*, after another remedy addressed in the next paragraph, *Wiþ ælfe 7 wiþ uncuþum sidsan* occurs.[57] It does not attest *ælfsīden* but it includes *sidsan*. *Sīdesa,* or *sīdsa*, indicates a magical influence, hence underlining the mental manipulation enacted by elves, while *uncuþum* translates "strange", probably referred to the symptoms of the ailment.

In *Leechbook III*, section 61, a remedy against *ælfcynn* "elf-kind"[58] that does not attest *ælfsīden*, is related to elfish nocturnal assault and it belongs to the group of recipes for treating harm caused by devils.[59]

HEALING *ÆLFĀDL* AND *ÆLFSOGOÞA*

Another evidence of *ælf* appears in one of the metrical charms of *Lacnunga, Wið færstice* "Against a sudden stitch",[60] opening with an epic description of craftsmen forging weapons. As Grendon stated, charms opened with an *historiola* to introduce the spell itself.[61] In the first part, the references to *spere* "speare", *wælspera* "battle-spear", *īsenes dǣl* "piece of iron", anticipate the so-called 'elf-shot' or projectile wound mentioned at the end, where three causes of ailment are introduced: *esa gescot* "æsir-shot",[62] *ylfa gescot* "elf-shot", *hægtessan gescot* "hag-shot".[63]

Scoten, gescot, gescoten are all polysemic and define internal pain or projectile wounds, being cognates of *sceōtan*, meaning "to shoot", from Proto-Germanic **skeutanan*. The verb is also mentioned in a remedy of *Bald's Leechbook II*, section 65, entitled *Gif hors ofscoten sīe*,[64] about how to cure horses from the wounds caused by projectiles. The last sentence cites *Sy þæt ylfa þe him se þis him mæg to bote* [Be the elf what it may, this is mighty for him to amend],[65] implying that horses can be assaulted by elves.

Some more attestations regarding elves causing internal distress can

be identified in the collection *Leechbook III*, expressed through some compounds: *ælfādl, ælfsogoþa, wæterælfādl*. The remedy of section 62 proceeds to describe the modus operandi against *ælfādl* "elf-disease".[66] Ādl is a term denoting sickness, from the Proto-Germanic **aidlō* "disease" and it is likely that *ælfādl* means "illness caused by elves". Moreover, the section mentions the signs to recognise *ælfsogoþa,* a type of *ælfādle*, concerning problems with liver and pancreas or digestive disorders.[67] Section 63 includes a cure for *wæterælfādl*,[68] This compound, like *ælfsogoþa*, was probably an hyponym of elf-disease and it can be interpreted as *wæter-ælfādl* "elf-disease causing watering", or as *wæterælf-ādl* "disease caused by water-elves".[69]

CONCLUSION

The fear of the unknown and the anxiety for what is 'beyond nature' has allowed the dissemination of many beliefs and the formulation of many explanations, in this case for disease. Associating distress with divine punishment, humours, or monsters was a product of the medieval mind that, torn between fear and superstition, found a justification for everything. A peculiar case was that of elves. Their conception has acquired a wide range in the texts belonging to Germanic tradition: from divine, heroic and fascinating figures, as attested in the Scandinavian context, to dangerous and monstrous creatures causing affliction to humankind. In this sense, Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts provide very useful evidences of how *ælfe* were seen as evil. This idea of creatures provoking psychological and physical distress, of monsters to be fought to the extent of resorting to magical and medical knowledge, consolidates in the compounds found among these remedies: *ælfsīden, ælfādl, wæterælfādl, ælfsogoþa*. Either out of fear or out of desire, the uniqueness of such creatures aroused an ambiguous feeling in the medieval man that found expression in literature. Elves are wonderfully fascinating and divine, but also uncannily dangerous and *uncuþum* creatures.

NOTES

1 Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology II* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1883), 439.
2 Joseph Frank Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 11.
3 Susan Zàvoti, "Blame it on the Elves: Perception of Sickness in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Medieval and Early Modern Literature, Science and Medicine* (Tübingen: Falconer & Renevey, 2013), 68.
4 Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England* (London: Longman, 1865), 3.
5 Leechdom, and so *Laecedom*, does not stem from the bloodsucking parasite (leech) but quite the opposite: what is known as leech takes its name from the medieval physician because they both drew blood.
6 Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, 61-62.
7 Ibidem, 49.
8 According to early Western physiology, humours (meaning 'liquids, fluids' in Latin) were the four fluids of the body that determined a person's temperament. These were blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile and the varying mixtures of these fluids caused a change in temperament, and in physical and mental disposition.
9 Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, 114.
10 Ibidem, 36-37.
11 The *Old English Pharmacopoeia* actually comprises two works, namely the *Old English Herbarium* and the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, that are translations into Old English of Latin scientific treatises dating back to the 11th century.
12 Neil Ripley Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 333.
13 Some pieces of *Bald's Leechbook* are found in other manuscript witnesses: London, British Library, Cotton Otho B XI; London, British Library, Nowell Transcript; Fragment Omont.
14 Book I (1-30) starts with the disorders of the head and proceeds with to eyes, ears, throat, face, nose, lips, thoracic organs, diaphragm, stomach, shoulders, thighs, knees, shins, feet and genitals; the remedies 31-60 focus on cutaneous pains, while those following deal with: (62) joints, (62-66) fever, (67) alimentation, (68) bites of spiders, (70) cures for the libido, (71) feet, (72) bloodletting, (73-77) cutaneous disorders, (78) appetite, (79 and 86) some magical remedies for a journey, (85) magical charm to win a battle, and the remaining relate some disorders like insomnia, cold, drunkenness.
15 Book II first deals with (1-16) stomach, (17-24) liver, (25-33) intestines, (34-45) spleen; then it proceeds with (46-51) lungs, (52-55) purgatives, (56) dysentery,

(59) paralysis, (64) a fragmentary letter from the Patriarch of Jerusalem to King Alfred, (65) miscellaneous recipes, (66) magical properties of jet, (67) densities of fluids.

16 Malcolm Laurence Cameron, "Bald's Leechbook: Its Sources and their use in its Compilation," *Anglo-Saxon England* 12 (1983): 164-165; Charles Holwell Talbot, "Some Notes on Anglo-Saxon Medicine." *Medical History* 9 (1965): 156-169.

17 Conan Doyle, "Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Disease: A Semantic Approach," (PhD thesis, Corpus Christi College Cambridge, 2011), 44.

18 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, xxi.

19 Ibidem, xx.

20 *Leechbook III* first deals with diseases of the head, eyes, ears, mouth, teeth, neck; then the order is broken and it focuses on cancer and bloody sputum. It proceeds with internal complaints (11-23) and then it returns to external pains (24-36). The structure *a capite ad calcem* is interrupted when it deals with eyes (46).

21 "Harley MS 585," *British Library Digitised Manuscripts,* Accessed May 21, 2020, http://bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_585.

22 Ker, *Catalogue*, xx-xxiii.

23 "Harley MS 585," *British Library Digitised Manuscripts*, Accessed May 21, 2020, http://bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_585.

24 Ker, *Catalogue*, 306.

25 Some textual correspondences have been found between *Lacnunga* and *Bald's Leechbook*. It is likely that some parts of *Bald's Leechbook* circulated independently and then were copied in Harley 585.

26 Edward Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The 'Lacnunga'* (Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 161-162.

27 Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, 27.

28 It only suffices to think about the rather recent fame of Tolkien's sagas that have significantly contributed to the popularity of these fantastic creatures. Being an expert of Germanic mythology, Tolkien invented the Elfish language and constructed a fantastic universe centred on elves, first in *The Silmarillion* and then in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Nonetheless, the tendency to deal with these creatures had definitely spread even before the birth of such fantasy fiction; thanks to German writers, who represented the tradition of elves in many works and myths, for example in the myth of "Erlkönig", a character appearing in many ballads of German Romanticism, the word "elf" started to be used as a loan-word from English in modern German. During the Elizabethan period, English literature saw the rise of many works containing a reference to elves and fairies, like Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Shakespeare's

A Midsummer Night's Dream (with the character of Robin 'Puck' Goodfellow), and a few centuries earlier, Geoffrey Chaucer introduced the elf-queen in *The Canterbury Tales* (like in the tale Sir Thopas, who desired the elf-queen).

29 "Ælf" was the noun widely used in the names of places and for personal names. Some examples are: Alfred, Ælfric, Alberich.

30 Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 177.

31 Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology II*, 444.

32 Elf in Mercian and Kentish, *ælf* in Northumbrian, *ylf* in West Saxon to translate the plural "elves", *ælfen* used to designate the female elf.

33 Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology II*, 442-444.

34 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 23.

35 Also known as *Prose Edda or Younger Edda*, is a work written in Iceland around the thirteenth century, comprising three books: *Gylfaginning, Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal.*

36 Anthony Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 444.

37 Faulkes, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál,* 133.

38 Aðalbjarnarson Bjarni, *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla* (Reyjkavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 1941), 79-82.

39 Gustav Neckel, E*dda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern: I*. Text (Heidelberg: Winter, 1962), 116-123.

40 Ibidem, 44, 102.

41 A skaldic poet who served many Swedish kings and who wrote *Ragnarsdrápa*.

42 Jónsson Finnur, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912), 12.

43 Herbert Dean Meritt, *Old English Glosses: A Collection* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 61.

44 On folio 101r of the manuscript Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit Voccius Lat. 4° 106.

45 *Nymphæ: ælfinni; Oreades: dūun-ælfinni; Dryades: uudu-ælfinne; Hamadryades: uater-ælfinn; Maides: feld.ælfinne; Naiades: sāe-ælfinne*.

46 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England,* 81-83.

47 Alger N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 167.

48 Albert S. Cook, *Judith: An Old English Epic Fragment* (Boston: D.C.Heath & Co. Publishers, 1888), 84.

49 Frederick Klaeber, *Beowulf* (Boston, Heath, 1950), 5.

50 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 119.

51 Text and translation from Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, 334-335: *Wyrc gōde sealfe wiþ fēondes costunga . bisceop wyrt . elehtre . harasprecel . strēawberian wīse. sīo*

clufihte wenwyrt eorðrima. brēmbel æppel . polleian . wermōd . gecnūa þā wyrta ealle āwylle on gōdre buteran wring þurh clāð sete under wēofod singe .viiii. mæssan ofer smire þone man mid on þā þunwonge. ┐ *bufan þām ēagum* ┐ *ufan þæt hēafod* ┐ *þā brēost* ┐ *under þām earmum þā sīdan . Þēos sealf is gōd wiþ ælcre fēondes costunga* ┐ *ælfsīdenne* ┐ *lenctenādle* ["Make a good salve against the temptations of the fiend. Bishopwort, lupin, viper's bugloss, strawberry plant, the cloved wenwort, earth rime, blackberry, pennyroyal, wormwood; pound all those roots; boil in good butter; wring through a cloth; set them under the altar; sing nine masses over them; smear the man therewith on the temples, and above the eyes, and above the head, and the breast, and the sides under the arms. This salve is good for every temptation of the fiend, and for a man full of elfin tricks, and for typhus-fever."].

52 Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 132.

53 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England,* 123.

54 Ibidem, 121.

55 John H. G. Grattan and Charles J. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated Specially From the Semipagan Text 'Lacnunga'* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 108.

56 Cockayne, Leechdoms, 138-141.

57 Ibidem, 296-297: *Wið ælfe 7 wiþ uncuþum sidsan gnid myrran on win 7 hwites recelses emmicel 7 sceaf gagates dæl þæs stanes on þæt win, drince .III. morgenas neaht nestig oþþe .VIIII. oþþe .XII.* ["Against an elf and against a strange visitor, rub myrrh in wine and as mickle of white frankincense, and shave off a part of the stone called agate into the wine, let him drink this for three mornings after his nights fast, or for nine, or for twelve"].

58 Ibidem, 344-345: *Wyrc sealfe wið ælfcynne 7 nihtgengan 7 þām mannum þe dēofol mid hæmð . genim ēowohumelan . wermōd bisceopwyrt . elehtre . æscþrote . beolone . hārewyrt. haransprecel. hæþbergean wīsan . croplēac . gārlēac . hegerifan corn . gyþrife . finul . Dō þās wyrta on ān fæt sete under wēofod sing ofer .viiii. mæssan āwyl on buteran 7 on scēapes smerwe dō hāliges sealtes fela on āsēoh þurh clāð. weorp þā wyrta on yrnende wæter . Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan. Smire his andwlitan mid þisse sealfe 7 on his ēagan dō and þær him sē līchoma sār sīe. 7 rēcelsa hine 7 sēna gelōme his þing biþ sōna sēlre.*
["Make a salve against the elfin race and nocturnal goblin visitors, and for the men with whom the devil hath carnal commerce; take the ewe hop plant, wormwood, bishopwort, lupin, ashthroat, henbane, harewort, vipers bugloss, heathberry plants, cropleck, garlic, grains of hedgerife, githrife, fennel; put these roots into a vessel, set them under the altar, sing over them nine masses, boil them in butter and sheeps' grease, add much holy salt, strain through a cloth, throw the roots into running water. If any ill tempting occur to a man, or an

elf or goblin night visitors come, smear his forehead with this salve, and put it on his eyes, and where his body is sore, and cense him, and sign him frequently (with the sign of the cross); his condition will soon be better"].

59 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England,* 126.

60 Ibidem, 2-3: *Hlūde wǣran hȳlā hlūde ðā hȳofer þone hlǣw ridan / wǣran ānmōde ðā hȳofer land ridan / scyld ðū ðē nū þū ðysne nīð genesan mōte / ūt lȳtel spere gif hēr inne sīe / stōd under linde under lēohtum scylde / þǣr ðā mihtigan wīf hyra mægen berǣddon / 7 hȳgyllende gāras sændan / ic him ōðerne eft wille sændan / flēogende flāne forane tōgēanes / ūt lȳtel spere gif hit hēr inne sȳ• / sæt smið slōh seax / lȳtel īserna wund swīðe / ūt lȳtel spere gif hēr inne sȳ / syx smiðas sǣtan wælspera worhtan / ūt spere næs in spere / gif hēr inne sȳ īsenes dǣl / hægtessan geweorc hit sceal gemyltan / gif ðū wǣre on fell scoten oððe wǣre on flǣsc scoten / oððe wǣre on blōd scoten / oððe wǣre on lið scoten nǣfre ne sȳðīn līf ātǣsed / gif hit wǣre ēsa gescot oððe hit wǣre* ***ylfa gescot*** */ oððe hit wǣre hægtessan gescot nū ic wille ðīn helpan / þis ðē tō bōte ēsa gescotes ðis ðē tō bōte* ***ylfa gescotes*** */ ðis ðē tō bōte hægtessan gescotes ic ðīn wille helpan / flēo þǣr on fyrgenhǣfde / hāl westū helpe ðīn drihten / nim þonne þæt seax ādō on wǣtan.* ["They were loud, yes, loud, when they rode over the (burial) mound; they were fierce when they rode across the land. Shield yourself now, you can survive this strife. Out, little spear, if there is one here within. It stood under/behind lime-wood (i.e. a shield), under a light-colored/light-weight shield, where those mighty women marshalled their powers, and they sent shrieking spears. I will send another back, a flying arrow ahead in opposition. Out, little spear, if it is here within. A craftsman sat, forged a knife/knives; small as swords go, violent the wound. Out, little spear, if it should be here within. Six craftsmen sat, wrought slaughter-spears. Be out, spear, not in, spear. If there is here within a piece of iron/swords, the work/deed of hægtessan, it must melt. If you were scoten in the skin or were scoten in the flesh, or were scoten in the blood, or were scoten in the limb, may your life never be harmed. If it was the gescot of ēse or it was the gescot of ælfe or it was the gescot of hægtessan, now I want to help you. This for you as a remedy for the gescot of ēse; this for you as a remedy for the gescot of ælfe, this for you as a remedy for the gescot of hægtessan; I will help you. Fly around there on the mountain top. Be healthy, may the Lord help you. Then take the knife; put it in (the) liquid."]

61 Felix Grendon, "The Anglo-Saxon Charms," *The Journal of American Folk-lore* 22, no. 84 (1909): 112.

62 One more piece of evidence for the relation between elves and Æsir, as anticipated in the Scandinavian examples.

63 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England,* 171.

64 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, 291-293: *Gif hors ofscoten sīe. nim þonne þæt seax þe þæt hæfte sīe fealo hryþeres horn ⁊ sīen .III. ærene næglas on. Wrīt þonne þām horse*

on þām hēafde foran crīstes mæl þæt hit blēde . Wrīt þonne on þām hricge crīstes mæl ┐ on leoþa gehwilcum þe þū ætfēolan mæge. nim þonne þæt winestre ēare þurh sting swīgende. Þis þū scealt dōn. genim āne girde slēah on þæt bæc þonne biþ þæt hors hāl. ┐ āwrīt on þæs seaxes horne þās word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Sypæt ylfa þe him sīe þis him mæg tō bōte. ["If a horse is badly pained. Take then a dagger whose haft is of fallowox's horn and in which there are three brass nails. Write/inscribe on the horse, on the forehead, Christ's mark, so it bleeds. Write/inscribe then Christ's mark on the spine and on each of the limbs which you can grasp. Then take the left ear, pierce it in silence. This shall you do: take a staff; strike on the back; then the horse will be well. And write/inscribe on the dagger's handle these words: bless all the works of the Lord of lords. Should it be ælfe's, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it."]

65 Ibidem, 290-291.

66 Ibidem, 344-347: *Wið ælfadle: nim bisceopwyrt, finul, elehtre, ælfþonan niopowearde, and gehalgodes cristes mæles ragu and stor. Do ælcre hand fulle. Bebind ealle þa wyrta on claþe. Bedyp on font wætre gehalgodum þriwa. Læt singan ofer .iii. mæssan: ane Omnibus Sanctis, opre Contra Tribulationem, þriddan Pro Infirmis. Do þonne gleda an gledfæt and lege þa wyrta on. Gerec þone man mid þam wyrtum ær undern and on niht, and sing letania and credan and pater noster, and writ him cristes mæl on ælcum lime, and nim lytle hand fulle þæs ilcan cynnes wyrta, gelice gehalgode, and wyl on meolce. Dryp þriwa gehalgodes wætres on and supe ær his mete. Him biþ sona sel.* ["Against elf disease; take bishopwort, fennel, lupin, the lower part of enchanters nightshade, and moss or lichen from the hallowed sign of Christ, and incense, of each a hand full; bind all the roots in a cloth, dip it thrice in hallowed font water, have sung over it three masses, one Omnibus Sanctis, another Contra Tribulationem, a third Pro Infirmis. Then put hot coals in a chafing dish and lay those plants in [it]. Smoke that person with the plants before 9 a.m. and at night, and sing litanies and credos and Pater Noster, and write the sign of the cross on each of his limbs, and take a little handful of the same plants of that kind, likewise consecrated, and boil in milk. Drip three [drops] of the holy water into [it] and sup [it] before his food. Soon he will be well"].

67 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 105.

68 Cockayne, *Leechdoms, 350-353: Gif mon biþ on wæter ælf adle, þonne beoþ him þa hand næglas wonne and þa eagan tearige, and wile locian niþer. Do him þis to læcedome: eoforþrote, cassuc, fone niþoweard, eowberge, elehtre, eolone, mersc mealwan crop, fen minte, dile, lilie, attorlaþe, polleie, marbubie, docce, ellen, felterre, wermod, streawbergean leaf, consolde. Ofgeot mid ealaþ. Do halig wæter to. Sing þis geador ofer þriwa* [. . .] ["If a person has water-elf-disease, then the fingernails will be dark and the eyes teary, and he will look downwards. Give

this to him as medicine: stemless carline thistle, reed, the lower part of flag, yewberry, lupin, elecampane, marshmallow head, water mint, dill, lily, fumitory, pennyroyal, white horehound, dock, elder, common centaury, wormwood, strawberry leaf, [and] comfrey. Soak with ale. Put holy water into [it]. Sing this incantation over [it] three times . . .”].

69 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 106.

The Fairy Supernatural of *Sir Orfeo*

ANGANA MOITRA

The term 'supernatural' typically summons up images of ghosts, spirits, demons, and other creatures of a fantastic or otherworldly nature, beings who despite being often invisible nevertheless make their presence felt, negotiating an uneasy and uncomfortable co-existence with the world of human mortals. Although the supernatural has been an enduring element of the human cultural imagination and although there is usually a tacit acknowledgement and understanding of what constitutes the broader denotative field, it is remarkably difficult to offer a coherent and comprehensive definition of the supernatural, one which can encompass the multiple and frequently shifting modes of representation latent in the category. Gradations of differences separate distinct sub-categories of the supernatural. For instance, a ghost is not the same as a poltergeist, which in turn is very different from a demon. Even individual supernatural figures are not ontologically fixed creations—a demon need not necessarily be the Devil of the Christian imagination but can also include the terrifying purveyors of the monstrous hellscapes of pre-Christian classical mythology as well as function as a metonym for the diabolical as a generic field. The supernatural is a particularly fluid field of signification, but this polyvalence is neither a modern condition, nor has it only been perceived by modern audiences. The ways of conceptualising the supernatural have always been diverse, but it can be argued that it was in the Middle Ages that the protean nature of this field was first properly recognised and subjected to detailed classificatory treatments. Medieval thinkers endlessly debated and theorised how the contours of the supernatural were drawn, and the Middle Ages witnessed an unprecedented profusion in the types

of figures included under the category of the 'supernatural.' Fairies were also included in this process of ontological augmentation, a fact which may seem surprising to us today, accustomed as we are to fairies as gossamer-winged, star-tipped wand-wielding figures of wish-fulfilment. However, it is important to bear in mind that this happy picture of shimmering magical beings was a consequence of the Victorian refashioning of fairies. Medieval fairies were very different from their modern counterparts, owing much more to their pagan forebears—classical demons, underworld gods, and deities of fate—and were frequently deployed as a specific species of the ambiguous supernatural. This paper will try to situate the fairies within the ambit of medieval beliefs about the supernatural before proceeding to a discussion of their use as devices of thematic structuring and plot-construction in the literary works of the Middle Ages, particularly the genre of the medieval romance. An analysis of the Middle English romance of *Sir Orfeo* will help to illustrate these points, demonstrating that the medieval supernatural was not a monolith but a dynamic cultural category capable of taking on a variety of meanings.

The medieval world inherited a welter of ideas about the supernatural from the classical pagan period through the conduit of Late Antique culture. In the case of medieval England, these pre-Christian ideas were not only reshaped in the light of the new scriptural dispensation established by the dominant religious system of Christianity but also dovetailed with insular folk belief as well as motifs which can be traced back to Germanic tradition. It is, however, important to note that the majority of surviving ideas about the medieval supernatural are derived from the writings of theologians, chroniclers, and schoolmen who communicated almost exclusively in Latin which was the language of both learned and ecclesiastical culture in the Middle Ages.[1] To the medieval mind, the category of the supernatural comprised such elements as miracles, signs, and demons. The belief in miracles (and their articulation by means

of signs or *signa* and portents or *portenta*) was posited against the burgeoning belief in nature as a regular, autonomously organised unit which operated in contradistinction to divine design. Miracles and signs were commonly interpreted either as a manifestation of magical mechanisms or as a demonstration of divine will, anomalous events which erupted in the ordinary course of things in order to enforce a moral or for purely didactic purposes. Demonology had a deeper history whereby the church fathers had over successive generations stressed the essentially evil nature of demons as well as conjectured about their physical forms (aerial, animal, disguised as human, or a grotesque admixture of these) and dwelling places (typically the lower air). Between the miraculous and the demonic, however, existed an interstitial, liminal space inhabited by supernatural beings which resisted easy and reductive classification into watertight compartments.[2] These ambiguous spirits were seen as the denizens of a mysterious, parallel realm which stood out in stark opposition not only to established theological truths but also against a nature that in the twelfth century was increasingly seen as patterned and regular. This liminality was endlessly fascinating for medieval writers and consequently the ambiguous supernatural made repeated appearances in twelfth-century textual culture under such elastic terms as *monstrum* (wonders, frequently monstrous, which revealed or portended something typically undefined), *prodigium* (prodigy), and *mirum/mirabilium* (marvels and the marvellous).[3] However, even as this ambiguity intrigued, it also bred an indeterminacy that was as linguistic as it was conceptual. These intermediate beings were variously described as demons, *portuni, effigies* or phantoms, fauns, and fairies or 'Fates,' thereby suggesting that the Latin language did not contain within its arsenal of spirit-names enough terms which could be appropriately applied to these abstruse productions of vernacular culture.[4] Although etymologically the word "fairy" derived from the Latin *fatum* meaning 'thing said' and was subsequently mis-identified with pagan female goddesses of fate through a process of

linguistic confusion (the neuter plural *fata* was misinterpreted as the feminine singular), the semantic field of the term broadened over time to encapsulate a cluster of associations related not only to the state of enchantment (the substantive *faierie*), the dwelling-place or abode (Fairyland), as well as liminal supernatural beings (fairies) themselves, but also such conceptual ideas as fate and the notion of 'fatedness,' death and the afterlife, ritual practices of burial and interment, and supernatural power or a principle of divine selection.[5] The associative link between fairies and the supernatural was underscored through the semiotics of magic which could be simultaneously viewed as both illicit and dangerous (and therefore in some sense diabolical) as well as an organic extension of a cosmos and nature that had an ineluctable lawful unity.[6] As the purveyors and practitioners of magic *par excellence*, fairies thus came to constitute a particular subset of the ambiguous supernatural.[7] The fictive universe of *Sir Orfeo* is embellished with a supernatural otherworld that is built upon this ontology of 'fairy', and it is to a discussion of this romance that I now turn.[8]

A medievalisation of the classical myth of Orpheus, *Sir Orfeo* is a Middle English romance conjecturally believed to have been composed around the beginning of the fourteenth century.[9] Orfeo is introduced as the king of England, possessed of a semi-divine lineage and governing an impressive kingdom from his capital at Thrace (which is explicitly identified with Winchester). On a balmy May morning, Orfeo's beloved wife Heurodis goes to the orchard with her train of ladies-in-waiting to enjoy the pleasant sunshine and falls asleep under a grafted tree. However, she awakes with a scream a little past noon and promptly falls into a paroxysm of agitation, tearing at her hair and clothes and scratching her face. She is taken to her bedchamber and shortly afterwards the king is summoned. Upon his concerned enquiry, the queen reveals that she had been visited by the King of the Fairies who had forcibly taken her to his kingdom, showing her the riches contained therein. The tour of his splendid

kingdom concluded, the Fairy King had returned Heurodis to the orchard, leaving her with the command that she was to be ready to be taken by the fairies the following morning, warning that her refusal to comply would be met with violence before her subsequent (and inevitable) removal to Fairyland. Orfeo is naturally alarmed by Heurodis' report and decides to employ the full strength of his army to protect the queen. His military fortification is, however, proved to be useless when the queen disappears from the midst of a heavily armed regiment the following day. Heartbroken and inconsolable at the loss of his wife, Orfeo resolves to forever quit the company of men and women, isolating himself from society by exiling himself to the woods. For ten years, Orfeo lives in a state of penurious contrition, scrounging off wild fruits and berries, his harp as his only companion. One day, however, Orfeo comes across a group of hunting ladies and, upon following them, is stunned to find Heurodis a part of the company. As the queen is whisked away by the hunting company, Orfeo resolves to follow them in an attempt to discover the whereabouts of his kidnapped wife. He follows the ladies through a rocky passage and comes out into a beautiful plain land dappled with light. In the middle of the land is a castle made of crystal, decorated with rich metalwork and studded with precious gemstones. Orfeo has entered Fairyland and the castle he espies is the palace of the Fairy King. Upon knocking at the gate, he is answered by a porter to whom he introduces himself as a minstrel. Orfeo is admitted into the palace and upon entering beholds a grisly exhibition of human beings in suspended animation, bodies contorted in various states of violence, seemingly entrapped in an endless cycle of agony and pain. He silently proceeds to the king's chamber and offers to regale the emperor with the music of his harp as a minstrel was wont to do. When the Fairy King, well-pleased with Orfeo's musical entertainment, asks him what he would like as a reward, Orfeo requests that he be allowed to take Heurodis back with him. Initially the Fairy King is reluctant to grant Orfeo's

wish, claiming that it was unbecoming of a lady so beautiful and regal as Heurodis to be in the company of a pilgrim so haggard and careworn as Orfeo. However, when Orfeo reminds him that it would be a greater shame for a king of his stature to renege on his promise, the Fairy King agrees to set Heurodis free. Reunited at last, the royal couple make their way back to Winchester where, following a test of the steward's fidelity (a test which he passes with flying colours), Orfeo is reinstated on his throne and the romance concludes on a celebratory note as his subjects rejoice at the return of their rightful king.

The first appearance of the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* is in the context of Heurodis' first abduction during her noontime siesta under the tree in the palace orchard. Although the reader's only impression of him at this point in the narrative is necessarily coloured by Heurodis' subjective report of an experience that has understandably been traumatic for her, the *Orfeo*-poet provides subtle clues to assist the reader in the task of interpretation. These include details of setting—the time of day at which Heurodis is abducted, the location in an orchard, and the specific placement beneath an "ympe-tre"—as well as Heurodis' subsequent hysteria. Heurodis' abduction takes place at "vndrentide," a time of day which is usually glossed to mean noon. In the scriptural commentaries of the scholiasts and patristic writers of the Middle Ages, noon was the time of day most closely associated with diabolical activity, a line of thinking harking back to the reference to the *daemonio meridiano* ('noon-day demon') of Psalm 90 and St. Jerome's subsequent interpretation of this figure as a reference to Satan. This identification of the Fairy King with Christian devils in general and Satan in particular was also sustained by medieval commentaries on, and manuscript illustrations of, the Orpheus myth. In the wake of Boethius' philosophical reformulation of the Orpheus episode in *The Consolation of Philosophy,* patristic exegesis usually interpreted the figure of Eurydice as a symbol of concupiscence and therefore as fair prey for Satan. Building upon the

tradition of viewing the snake responsible for the death of Eurydice in the Virgilian and Ovidian versions of the Orpheus story as a symbolic representation of Satan's temptation of Eve, manuscript illustrations of the myth frequently depicted Eurydice being kidnapped by winged dragons and serpents, artistic equivalents of the popular conception of Satan as the draconopede (man-headed dragon).[10] The Fairy King's appearance at noon would thus seem to ally him with Satan when judged from the viewpoint of medieval Christian discourse. An interesting dimension is also added by the fact of Heurodis' abduction from beneath an "ympe-tre." Curtis R. H. Jirsa notes that the term *ympe* (whose French equivalent is *ente*) referred to a grafted tree of any species and thereby denoted an arboricultural category. He also argues that the implications of Heurodis' decision to sleep in the shadow of the "ympe-tre" can only be appreciated by taking recourse to classical and medieval arboreal lore which often detailed the malevolent properties of trees and the fatal effects of tree shadows.[11] Abduction by supernatural beings from beneath grafted trees was, however, a well-established motif in medieval romances written in both French and English, and it is this association that medieval audiences would probably have been most responsive to.[12] The *topos* of the orchard together with its historical and cultural associations adds further significance to these readings. In the Middle Ages, orchards in royal palaces were typically walled, enclosed spaces intended for the delectation and amusement of the queen and her female consorts. Orchards, however, also had a Biblical resonance. The cultivated space of the orchard where horticultural practices were intended to domesticate nature could also be evocative of Paradise, the idyllic gardens of the Song of Songs, as well as a pre-lapsarian Eden.[13] When viewed within these contexts, it becomes clear that the Fairy King is meant to evoke and sustain multiple modes of identification—there is sufficient scriptural precedent to encourage the reader/audience to view him as diabolical and the act of his

abduction as a specific reference to the Temptation and the Fall even as his activities are entirely in keeping with the intractable behaviour of supernatural beings, particularly fairies, in contemporary insular literature.

Heurodis' report paints an impressive picture of the Fairy King, offering a glimpse into both his wealth and largesse as well as his military might. For the full impact of the visual spectacle of Fairyland, however, we have to wait for Orfeo's personal visit to the realm:

> He com in-to a fair cuntray,
> As bri3t so sonne on somers day,
> Smoþe & plain & al grene
> — Hille no dale nas þer non y-sene.
> Amidde þe lond a castel he si3e,
> Riche & real & wonder hei3e:
> Al þe vt-mast wal
> Was clere & schine as cristal;
> An hundred tours þer were about,
> Degiselich & bataild stout;
> Þe butras com out of þe diche
> Of rede gold y-arched riche;
> Þe vousour was auowed al
> Of ich maner diuers aumal.
> Wiþ-in þer wer wide wones,
> Al of precious stones;
> Þe werst piler on to biholde
> Was al of burnist gold.
> Al þat lond was euer li3t,
> For when it schuld be þerk & ni3t
> Þe riche stones li3t gonne
> As bri3t as doþ at none þe sonne.
> No man may telle, no þenche in þou3t,

> Þe riche werk þat þer was wrouȝt:
> Bi al þing him þink þat it is
> Þe proude court of Paradis.

> [Orfeo] came in to a fair country which was as bright as the sun on a summer's day. The land was smooth and covered in green, rolling plains—no hill or dale interrupted the undulation of the land. In the middle of the land he saw a castle, richly bedecked and wonderful to behold. The outermost wall was transparent and shone like crystal. Circling the façade were a hundred towers, stoutly built. The buttress protruded out of the moat, arched with red-hued gold. The vaulting was adorned with diverse kinds of enamelwork. The dwelling-places of the interior were all constructed out of precious stones; indeed, even the worst-looking pillar was made out of burnished gold. The land was perennially enveloped in light, since even when it should be dark during night-time, the irradiance of the gemstones would make the land sparkle as brightly as though it were lit up by the midday sun. No man could describe or even conceive in thought all the riches that were wrought in the fairy palace; in fact, for all intents and purposes, he might think that he was standing at the threshold of Paradise.[14]

There is a superabundance of riches in the fairy palace which combine to give the impression of a visually stunning edifice. The aesthetics of the topography with its presentation of a castle on plain land seem to suggest an allegorical landscape, evoking simultaneous echoes of the round of medieval morality plays, classical temples dedicated to such goddesses as Fortuna or Venus, as well as the indeterminacy of Dante's Limbo.[15] However, the *Orfeo*-poet has embellished his account of the exterior of the fairy palace with details which can be better appreciated by keeping in mind the material culture of the Middle Ages. Seth

Lerer has pointed out how the description of Fairyland borrows from the technical vocabulary of both thirteenth and fourteenth-century English painting as well as contemporary architecture. In particular, the precious enamelwork of the palace would have suggested the latest in decorative technique to medieval readers and audiences.[16] Indeed, as Dominique Battles has demonstrated, the architectural details of the fairy palace—such as the moat, the crystal walls, the well-fortified towers, and the buttresses—appear to contain references to Norman castle architecture in post-Conquest England.[17] Technicalities of construction notwithstanding, there is reason to believe that medieval audiences would have more readily responded to another line of association more self-evident and obvious than architectural theory—the connection between the fairy palace and Biblical imagery. Aisling Byrne has demonstrated that the details of the exterior of the Fairy King's palace are heavily reliant on descriptions of New Jerusalem found in the Book of Revelation, an observation that gains greater salience when we bear in mind that the poet himself writes that the palace's appearance reminded Orfeo of "þe proude court of Paradis."[18] Thus, the external appearance of the fairy palace seems to convey a plethora of impressions—while the sumptuousness of the structure's decoration and adornment serves as a spectacle of superlative excess which could hint at the artificiality of the realm (an observation complemented by the fact that the kingdom never sees darkness on account of the perennially twinkling lights), specific details also seem to carry a distinctively scriptural import, thereby suggesting that the domain is also, in certain respects, closer to heavenly topography. The reader/audience is encouraged to view the Fairy King not only as a powerful overlord who wishes to make an emphatic statement of his material and symbolic status, but also as an artist and curator who has consciously fashioned his residence to resemble the divine court of Paradise. The (relatively) benign expectations set up by the palace exterior are, however, radically overturned when Orfeo steps into the courtyard of the palace.

Of all the scenes in *Sir Orfeo*, the gallery of victims exhibited in the courtyard of the fairy palace has attracted the most scholarly attention, a fact unsurprising in view of not only the macabre violence of the scene but also on account of the absolutely unwarranted nature of such cruelty. Just when both Orfeo's and the reader's/audience's view of the Fairy King had begun to settle down into a sort of grudging (if somewhat uncomfortable) admiration of the gorgeous artistry and the quasi-divine echoes of the palace exterior, the presentation of a grisly exhibit of mortals entrapped in seemingly endless cycles of torture, mutilation, and horrific punishments in the courtyard of the palace produces a markedly disturbing effect. As with the abduction of Heurodis, no cause or reason is proffered to help the reader/audience make sense of what is being witnessed. The appearance of this mute gallery of helpless souls immediately after the description of the pristine landscape and the architectural marvels of the palace's construction serves to thoroughly subvert whatever expectations may have been built regarding the Fairy King's aesthetic sensibilities and his creative temperament. The brutality of the privations suffered by the victims together with the uncertainty about their ontological status (are they alive or dead?) sharply magnifies the uncanniness of Fairyland:

> Þan he gan bihold about al
> & seiȝe liggeand wiþ-in þe wal
> Of folk þat were þider y-brouȝt,
> & þouȝt dede, & nare nouȝt.
> Sum stode wiþ-outen hade,
> & sum non armes nade,
> & sum þurth þe bodi hadde wounde,
> & sum lay wode, y-bounde,
> & sum armed on hors sete,
> & sum astrangled as þai ete;
> & sum were in water adreynt,

& sum wiþ fire al for-schreynt.
Wiues þer lay on child-bedde,
Sum ded & sum awedde,
& wonder fele þer lay bisides:
Riȝt as þai slepe her vnder-tides
Eche was þus in þis warld y-nome,
Wiþ fairi þider y-come. (ll. 387–404)

Then he [Orfeo] looked around him and saw lying within the palace walls folk that had been brought there and were thought to be dead, although they were not. Some stood without heads, some had no arms, some had wounds through the body, some lay bound in the throes of insanity, some sat armed on horseback, some were being strangled as they ate, some were being drowned in water, while still others were being withered by fire. There were wives in travail (lit. 'on childbed'), some dead and some who had been driven to madness. There were many others who lay there right as they had been sleeping at noon. Each was thus taken into this world by the fairies.

Multiple interpretations have been offered to explain the precise meaning of this passage. The gallery of victims in the poem has been subjected to traditionalist approaches which have viewed this passage as an interpolation and the details as reminiscent of either classical descriptions of the Underworld, insular (particularly Irish) beliefs about the dead, and ideas about the macabre and the horrific. There have been more recent critical reappraisals through the lens of medieval wonder theory, Roman imperial architectural practices, and even queer theory.[19] Critical opinion has been unable to reach a consensus about the true nature, import, and meaning of Fairyland. That is, however, precisely the point. I would like to argue that the inability of readers/audiences (and scholars) to adopt one dominant strand of interpretation in trying to make hermeneutic

sense of Fairyland is the result of a conscious and deliberate artistic choice made by the *Orfeo*-poet in order to highlight the liminality of Fairyland as a supernatural space and its potential to produce profound moral, theological, and ontological discomfort. As an accomplished craftsman responding to contemporary literary and cultural expectations about fairies, the *Orfeo*-poet has couched his presentation of Fairyland within the context of multiple, not always or even necessarily compatible, discourses and traditions. As an obvious medievalisation of a classical myth, the poem has retained many of its 'pagan' qualities by which Fairyland becomes the medieval equivalent of the Underworld and the Fairy King the romance equivalent of Dis/Pluto. In transposing classical material to a medieval milieu, the poet also borrowed details from the supernatural apparatus of insular folklore, thereby synthesising native superstitions about death, burial practices, the afterlife, and their intrinsic connection with fairies. This confluence of Graeco-Roman and insular elements was also undoubtedly informed by attitudes conditioned by the dominant religious discourse of Christianity. The *Orfeo*-poet must have been aware not only of the association between fairies and diabolical agents made predominantly by the church fathers, but also of concurrent Christian interpretations of the Orpheus legend by exegetes and patristic writers. Thus, the Fairy King also seems to evoke medieval conceptions of Satan while Fairyland is suggestive at various points (perhaps most clearly in the gallery) of the architectonics and the sufferings of Hell. The *Orfeo*-poet does not, however, permit either of these wider discourses to take the upper hand, preferring instead to exploit the creative possibilities inherent in the dynamic interplay of the three (that is, Graeco-Roman, insular, and Christian). Just as contemporary (non-clerical) opinion on fairies and the supernatural was marked by ambivalence, the poet creates a Fairyland whose internal mechanics are complicated by external appearance.

The fairy supernatural of *Sir Orfeo* is constructed within a matrix of diverse and distinct traditions. The Fairy King is not only the

medieval equivalent of the pagan Dis/Pluto but also bears similarities with certain aspects of figures culled from indigenous folk literature and exhibits features reminiscent of contemporary clerical writings about the Devil and other diabolical creatures. However, even though he recalls a multitude of traditions, he does not definitively belong to any one. In fact, in this ontological to-and-fro between discrete conventional and generic frameworks, the Fairy King is characterised by an ambivalence and indeterminacy that allies him above all with the tribe of the fairies, liminal beings who functioned in the popular imagination of the Middle Ages as intermediaries between the human and the supernatural worlds. His ambiguity is a direct consequence of his inassimilable nature, and his actions are inscrutable because he operates outside the realm of human judgment.[20] His kingdom of Fairyland is a picture of puzzling contradictions in which received expectations are subverted and destabilised at every step. Although the landscape is pleasing and the exterior of the palace presents a profusion of riches, the interior contains a gruesome spectacle of torture and punishment and no rationale is provided within the narrative of the poem to explicitly justify its presence. Indeed, the superabundance of material wealth is indicative of an unnecessary excess and generates an uncanny effect which is concomitant with the suppositional horror of the unknown.[21] The presentation of the gallery reinforces the status of *Orfeo*'s Fairyland—like fairy otherworlds in general—as a locus of chaotic signification, one whose disorienting impact is analogous to an experience of moral and cognitive entropy.[22] However, the *Orfeo*-poet refuses to let the final verdict settle in favour of the absolutely wicked and the monstrous. Just when cognitive expectations of the nefariousness of Fairyland have begun to solidify, the poet presents a picture of a hall whose construction is reminiscent of Biblical architecture and whose patron behaves not only like a connoisseur of beauty (although his aesthetics are, in many respects, questionable from the standpoint of a human observer) but also acts in accordance with his word. This constant oscillation of both the

Fairy King and Fairyland between divergent modes is, in my reading, not only a direct consequence of cultural attitudes about supernatural creatures in general and fairies in particular, but also a conscious artistic flourish on the part of a consummate craftsman, one who was alert to the greater attractiveness of texts which resisted closed, monolithic explanations in favour of letting readers and audiences choose which interpretative pathways to take.

NOTES

1 Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 13.

2 Accessible overviews of clerical opinion on supernatural beings and how they dovetailed with such figures as the fairies and such notions as the 'diabolical' and the 'demonic' can be found in Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) and Coree Newman, "The Good, the Bad and the Unholy: Ambivalent Angels in the Middle Ages," in *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits: 'Small Gods' at the Margins of Christendom,* ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 103-122.

3 Detailed discussions of these complicated and frequently conflicting ideas can be found in Carl Watkins' *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

4 Watkins points out that although the term *'supernaturalis'* was available in the twelfth century, it acquired close definition and widespread use only in the later thirteenth, due in large part to the efforts of Thomas Aquinas.

5 Noel Williams, "The Semantics of the Word Fairy: Making Meaning Out of Thin Air," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1991), 462-472 and Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine; La naissance des fées* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1984).

6 Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, 5.

7 The view of fairies as users of magic was a particular characteristic of the literary fairy. For more on this textual representation, see James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

8 "Ontology of fairy" is a term used by Matthew Woodcock in his monograph *Fairy in* The Faerie Queene: *Renaissance Elf-Fashioning and Elizabethan Myth-Making* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). For a detailed explanation of the term, see Chapter 1 ("Reading Fairies in Early Modern Texts") of the same work.

9 The most authoritative discussion of the romance's provenance and textual history is A. J. Bliss' introduction in Bliss, ed., *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), ix-li.

10 John Block Friedman, "Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-Day Demon," *Speculum* 41, no. 1 (1966): 22-29.

11 Curtis R. H. Jirsa, "In the Shadow of the Ympe-Tre: Arboreal Folklore in *Sir Orfeo*," *English Studies* 89, no. 2 (2008): 141-151.

12 Although the references to grafted trees in medieval romances are too numerous to note, some particularly memorable incidents of kidnapping of mortals by supernatural creatures (albeit in pointedly erotic contexts) occur in *Sir Gowther, Tydorel, Lancelot, Thomas of Erceldoune,* and *Launfal*. Trees with magical, otherworldly properties also abounded in Irish literature.

13 The point about the orchard as a locus of the Fall is made in David Lyle Jeffrey, "The Exiled King: Sir Orfeo's Harp and the Second Death of Eurydice," *Mosaic* 9, no. 2 (1976): 45-60 and the similarities between Orfeo's orchard and the luscious gardens of the Song of Songs are noted by Robert M. Longsworth, "*Sir Orfeo*, The Minstrel, and the Minstrel's Art," *Studies in Philology* 79, no. 1 (1982): 1-11.

14 Bliss, *Sir Orfeo*, 31-33, ll. 351-376. All subsequent references are to this edition by line number. All quoted excerpts are from the Auchinleck version of the poem. All translations of quoted passages are my own. They are loose translations since I have aimed at capturing the essence of the words rather than producing an exact prose equivalent.

15 E. C. Ronquist, "The Powers of Poetry in *Sir Orfeo*," *Philological Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1985): 103.

16 Seth Lerer, "Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 60, no. 1 (1985): 98-101.

17 Dominique Battles, "*Sir Orfeo* and English Identity," *Studies in Philology* 107, no. 2 (2010): 186-196.

18 Aisling Byrne, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91-96. Byrne points out that the *Orfeo*-poet has adopted not only specific details—the size of the castle, the crystal walls, the use of precious stones as building materials, and the everlasting brightness of the land—but also the precise order of their presentation in the account of Revelation 21.

19 For illustrations of each approach, see Bruce Mitchell, "The Faery World of *Sir Orfeo*," *Neophilologus* 48, no. 2 (1964): 155-159, Constance Davies, "Classical

Threads in 'Orfeo'," *Modern Language Review* 56, no. 2 (1961): 161–166, Dorena Allen, "Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the Taken," *Medium Aevum* 33, no. 1 (1964): 102-111, Felicity Riddy, "The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo," Yearbook of English Studies* 6 (1976): 5-15, Tara Williams, "Fairy Magic, Wonder, and Morality in *Sir Orfeo," Philological Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (2012): 537-568, Anne Marie D'Arcy, "The Faerie King's *Kunstkammer*: Imperial Discourse and the Wondrous in *Sir Orfeo*," *Review of English Studies* 58, no. 233 (2007): 10-33, and Amy Morgan, "Fairies, Monsters and the Queer Otherworld: Otherness in Sir *Orfeo*," in *On the Fringes: Outsiders and Otherness in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds,* eds. Natalie Goodison and Alexander J. Wilson, Proceedings of the 2014 MEMSA Student Conference (Durham: Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 2015), 45-66.

20 Mary Hynes-Berry, "Cohesion in *King Horn* and *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 50, no. 4 (1975): 655.

21 Rosalind Clark, "Sir Orfeo: The Otherworld vs. Faithful Human Love," *Enarratio,* 2 (1993): 72.

22 Neil Cartlidge, "Sir Orfeo in the Otherworld: Courting Chaos?" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 26 (2004): 200.

Paracelsus, Heinrich Khunrath and Macbeth: An Alchemical Argument

NIRANJAN GOSWAMI

Full fadom five thy father lies;
    Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
    Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
    Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
    Burthen: Ding-dong.
Hark! now I hear them,—ding-dong, bell.
(*The Tempest*, I.ii.399-407)[1]

The popularity of this song about the alchemical transformation of Alonso would indicate that Shakespeare's knowledge of alchemy is well-known. However, things are not so simple. A search on earlier writings on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and magic proved to be almost fruitless. One small paragraph in Frances Yates' *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* has this to say on *Macbeth*:

> The world of Macbeth and his wife is a school of night indeed, where witches incite to murder. The deep damnation of this deed is trumpeted against by angels, by 'heaven's cherubins', whose universal harmony is heard only in the form of judgment.[2]

Yates appears disappointed here in not finding in the play the

Spenserian type of fairies, elves, angels or daemons suitable for Romance. Her discussion in the book revolves round *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Love's Labour Lost* and, of course, *The Tempest*. In this book she principally discusses Christian Cabala and white magic in the Renaissance. In this respect *Macbeth* is a tortuous text redolent of black magic.

My purpose in this essay, however, is not to discuss magic but alchemy, a closely related but more intricate subject pursued by scholars in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in England and Europe. Whereas readers will recognise Paracelsus as a major source of alchemical literature in Europe, Heinrich Khunrath of Leipzig (1560-1605) would probably appear unfamiliar in a discussion of Shakespeare's play. From Stuart Gillespie we know about his familiarity with James I's *Daemonologie* and it has been suggested as a probable source of the weird sisters in *Macbeth*. James discusses necromancy and witchcraft in this book, rightfully so, having a first-hand experience in the North Berwick witch trials from 1590. Samuel Harsnett, the Archbishop of York wrote a sceptical and polemical pamphlet *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603; 1605). This book has been identified as the source of the names of demons mentioned by Edgar as Tom O' Bedlam in *King Lear* (1608).

Macbeth is probably Shakespeare's only play that uses a laboratory image from alchemy. Lady Macbeth in broaching her plan tells Macbeth how the guards poisoned and intoxicated through her clever design would not be able to apply reason:

> his two chamberlains
> Will I with wine and wassail so convince,
> That memory, the warder of the brain,
> Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
> A limbeck only:[3] (I.vii.64-68)

Kenneth Muir in a note quotes from E. Schanzer an explanation of

these lines: "the receptacle which should collect only the pure drops of reason, the final distillate of the thought-process, will be turned into the retort in which the crude undistilled liquids bubble and fume." He further glosses 'limbeck' as "the corrupt form of 'alembic', a word adopted into most European languages from the Arabic of the Moorish alchemists of Spain."[4]

Macbeth, it is believed, was written between 1603 and 1606. For some reason, it appears that not only witchcraft but alchemy was also in Shakespeare's mind in this period. Shakespeare uses the term alchemy with reference to its heavenly power of purifying or enriching something in *Julius Caesar* (first performed in 1599) and Sonnets 33 and 114 (1609).[5] This was, of course, a commonplace use of the word 'alchemy' in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. Alchemy has often been associated by poets with love and religion because of its ennobling power. Stanton J. Linden has argued that from Chaucer to Ben Jonson writers have expressed an attitude towards alchemy, which is of "mirth, amazement, scepticism, outrage, bitterness and contempt."[6]

Regarding the use of alchemy in the European and English tradition Peggy Muñoz Simonds comments:

> Famous Renaissance magicians who practised alchemy as part of their repertoire included Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, Giambattista della Porta of Naples, and the English alchemist Dr. John Dee, who taught chemistry to Sir Philip Sidney and his group . . . alchemy often served as the poetic metaphor for wit, love, death, religious conversion and salvation and political reform—even for the transforming art of poetry itself in the works of such authors as John Skelton, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir John Davies, John Donne, George Herbert, John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan and many others . . .[7]

Simonds comes to conclude that "[t]hus the science of alchemy

was by Shakespeare's time already a recognized metonym for reform and change that would soon be taken up with considerable enthusiasm by Puritans, Quakers, Levellers, and others, but was then employed later in the century with equal fervour against the Cromwellian revolutionaries by Charles II and his royalist supporters as validation for the restoration of the monarchy."[8] According to his argument, it appears that in his mature vision in *The Tempest* (written in 1610/1611) Shakespeare presented Prospero, the magus alchemist performing a highly successful *opus* through all ten stages of *divisio, salsatura, nigredo, solve et coagula,* washing and dying, *cauda pavonis*, the *conjunctio*, squaring the circle, the *albedo* and *lapis* or the philosopher's stone.[9] One may therefore safely argue that Shakespeare used alchemical imagery throughout his writing career. I must now briefly explain the place of alchemy in the contemporary discourse and how it is relevant for our understanding of *Macbeth*.

Persians and Arabs adopted the Greek traditions from the Eighth century CE and Sufi Jabir Ibn Hayaan (ca 721-ca 815) promoted the Sulphur-Mercury theory of the Philosophers' Stone and popularized the idea of the production of an elixir that can cure human diseases as well as transform lesser metals into gold. In this period, we find the most famous text on alchemy, *Emerald Tablet* by Hermes Trismegistus in Arabic. The Andalusian scholar and mystic Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) first mentions that the science of alchemy is of three kinds: natural, spiritual and divine. The Arabic texts were translated into Latin in the twelfth century and the West came to know about the laboratory practice of alchemy. However, even at this early age, besides the material gold-making context a larger spiritual and theological context of alchemy began to develop and it is in this larger context that *Macbeth* becomes a text immersed in the process of spiritual/psychological transformation.[10]

The project of alchemy (turning base metal into gold with literal,

metaphorical and spiritual interpretations) was usually referred to in alchemical texts as the Great Work or the *opus magnum* or simply, *opus.* In the Christian Middle Ages the story of Christ was used as an exemplum for the various processes of the Great Work. The preparation of the alchemical elixir is seen as analogous to the conception, nativity, passion and resurrection of Christ. Peter Forshaw mentions one Frater Ulmannus who in his *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit (Book of the Holy Trinity)* "discusses laboratory alchemy in a heady mixture of imperial German politics and Marian theology, including images of Christ as an alchemical eagle and Lucifer (with his mother!) as an alchemical hermaphrodite, symbols respectively of correct and misguided laboratory practice, with some consideration of the moral nature of the practitioner thrown in for good measure."[11] Some of these images will be explained later in this essay. Forshaw helps us to build the English context of supernatural alchemy:

> This notion of supernatural alchemy came to prominence in the early modern works of figures like Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605), Elias Ashmole (1617-1692), and Robert Boyle (1627-1691) . . . This supernatural dimension appears in a different way in the manuscripts of English astrologer, alchemist and physician Simon Forman (1552-1611), whose plans for laboratory practice included casting astrological charts in order to check for the malign presence for evil spirits or beneficial aid of angels.[12]

Readers of Kenneth Muir's edition of *Macbeth* are aware of Forman's description of witnessing the performance of the play in 1611 at the Globe. Many of Simon's interests like his problem-solving, use of drugs, healing women's diseases find a reflection in *Macbeth*. We wonder if he recognised the strong alchemical context of the play. There is, however, no such indication in his bland summary of the

play. We find the following information about Simon Forman:

> Forman's papers have proven to be a treasure trove of rare, odd, unusual data on one of the most studied periods of cultural history. They include autobiographies, guides to astrology, plague tracts, alchemical commonplace books and notes on biblical and historical subjects. They also contain his disputes with the College of Physicians and his largely unsuccessful magical experiments.[13]

Elias Ashmole, the donor helping to create the Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford, collected Forman's papers. Though he comes late for our purpose, yet we will briefly look at him in order to understand the continuation of the alchemical tradition in England better:

> During the 1650s, Ashmole devoted a great deal of energy to the study of alchemy. In 1650, he published *Fasciculus Chemicus* under the anagrammatic pseudonym James Hasolle. This work was an English translation of two Latin alchemical works, one by Arthur Dee, the son of John Dee. In 1652, he published his most important alchemical work, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, an extensively annotated compilation of metaphysical poems in English.[14] . . . His final alchemical publication was *The Way to Bliss* in 1658, but thereafter his interest seems to wane in favour of his other pursuits. Ashmole promoted the use of therapeutic remedies drawing on both Galenic and Paracelsian principles, and his works attempt to merge the two schools. *The Way to Bliss* recommends ways to prevent illness: a balanced diet, moderate exercise and enough sleep. His works were avidly studied by other natural philosophers, such as Isaac Newton.[15]

The alchemical tradition in England that can be traced from John Dee to Isaac Newton could not but form a large and influential part in the intellectual history in Shakespeare's time. The wave of scepticism in the sixteenth century as a result of the development of Baconian science (Bacon himself believed in alchemy) and the Royal Society led to a poor and satirical representation of alchemists as frauds and tricksters in writers such as Ben Jonson.[16] We need to go back to the history of medicine once again to recover the context of alchemy and the importance of Paracelsus in Shakespeare's time.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARACELSUS

The Swiss Chymist Theophrastus Paracelsus of Hohenheim (1552-1611) scandalised the medical community by suggesting that there were two types of medical alchemy—Chymiatria and Spagyria. He focused both on incurable bodily diseases like leprosy, syphilis, gout and 'spiritual diseases' like mania, epilepsy, lunacy. We find in *Macbeth* the reference to curing difficult physical diseases (in the King's evil episode) as well as mania (washing of hands) and mental obsessions. In *Labyrinthus medicorum errantium* (1537-41), his critique of scholastic medicine, Paracelsus declared that magic was the 'Anatomy of Medicine,' its "mistress, preceptoress and doctoress," suggesting that those who were not familiar with Cabala and magic would find it difficult to practise medicine. Among the medical disputations published in Basel among the contemporaries of Khunrath Forshaw mentions those on subjects of sympathies and antipathies of elements, heartbeat, philosophical and medical actions and one significantly on sleep, walking and comas (1583).[17] Though Shakespeare is unlikely to read the Latin treatise, sleep and dreams being matters of contemporary research, it is possible that he was making the best poetic use of such burning questions on the frontier of knowledge. His interest in madness would have

inclined him towards Paracelsian discussion of such topics for the simple reason that there was no proper Galenic treatment of such diseases as somnambulism or madness and melancholy. The Doctor in Macbeth is clearly out of bounds in treating Lady Macbeth. The frustration at lack of treatment in contemporary medicine finds expression in Macbeth's angry retort: "Throw physic to the dogs" (V.iii.47).[18] Paracelsus encouraged the combination of astrology and magic with alchemy and emphasized practical laboratory alchemy alongside works discussing elemental beings, man's ethereal body and contact with spirits.[19]

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEINRICH KHUNRATH

The medical sects in Khunrath's day were divided into two groups: the *Chymiatri* and the *Paracelcisti*. The first group believed in the allopathic cure of Galen and Hippocrates and the latter were the followers of the homeopathic cure (based on the principle of 'like cures like') of Paracelsus and practised the magic of their master's *Philosophia sagax*, a book filled with necromancy, vain astrology, signatures, uncertain arts, and the summoning of devils and spirits. According to Libavius, their works are founded on paradoxes, absurdities and madness. Oswald Croll may be mentioned as a prominent alchemist of the Paracelsist group but he practised in Germany.[20] He is full of praise for Heinrich Khunrath, who met John Dee while in Bremen. Libavius mentions the Paracelsians as anti-Aristotle. When Khunrath and Libavius were submitting their theses at Basel, the Professor of Theoretical Medicine was Theodor Zwinger (1533-1588), a follower of the anti-Aristotelian Huguenot Petrus Ramus. It appears that the Chymical Medicine practised by Paracelsus, though privately liked by many physicians in Basel, was yet publicly avoided and those who were not able to conceal their interest often faced difficulties in promotion.[21]

Khunrath's reputation as a spiritual alchemist is principally founded on his baroquely illustrated *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (1609), which never presents itself as a work strictly devoted to alchemy, but incorporates 'Physico-Chemistry' into a broader theosophical project. Some of the illustrations from this work have been reproduced even in modern critical literature on alchemy and I will also include a few of them. The first engraving shows the oratory-cum-laboratory of the alchemist. This combination of theoretical wisdom and practical experimentation is the hallmark of a wise alchemist. He is depicted as praying to God (Jehova) on the left. On the right is his cabinet of ingredients and furnace for boiling; in the middle piles of musical instruments suggest the centrality of music in the alchemical work. The perspectivism of the architecture suggests the importance of mathematics and geometry in the alchemist's work. It is clear that the process is dangerous

Photo 1: The Cabalist-Alchemist. From H. Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*

and the alchemist through prayer solicits supernatural help. He also needs music to calm him down. *Macbeth* is a play where the heightened nerves are never soothed and it is absolutely without any role of music excepting the chanting by the witches.[22]

Paracelsian influence on Renaissance thought descended heavily through the works of Khunrath. The names of his theses are mostly directly taken from Paracelsus's works. How closely Khunrath propagated Paracelsus cannot be made obvious without quoting the works of Khunrath and his sources provided by Forshaw. I therefore mention the Paracelsian sources in a note here though I did not check them myself but relied upon Forshaw:

> Khunrath defended twenty-eight theses *On the Signatures of Natural Things*, arguing for the revival of the occult doctrine of signatures for medical purposes. The title of the theses more than likely alludes to the already-mentioned *De natura rerum*, attributed to Paracelsus, the ninth book of which bears the same heading as Khunrath's dissertation.[23] Khunrath's theses represent a "natural philosophical concept of a rational hermeneutic of nature," one that sees connections in all things and which orients itself to phenomena on the assumption that the outward appearances, forms, and visible symmetries of things reveal their inner qualities.[24]

Like Paracelsus, Khunrath argues that knowledge gained by *ratio et experientia* (reason and experiment) should be augmented by and subordinated to knowledge of a higher order. "The true wise man is Θεοδιδακτος [theodidactos], "taught by God", either in hypnotic visions or dream-revelations and union with good ('hyperphysical') spirits".[25] Khunrath uses the Greek word hyperphysical rather than the Latin word supernatural.

ALCHEMY AND THE JUNGIAN PARADIGM OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Before I can argue the place and role of alchemy in *Macbeth* any further, I must lay down some basic ideas of alchemy, conveniently interpreted for us by Jung. Nathan Schwarz-Salant writes in his introduction to *Jung on Alchemy*:

> Alchemists knew by their accumulated experience of centuries of traditional cultures, that their personalities could be transformed. Through initiation rites they felt different, behaved differently, and grew in new ways. . . . Alchemy developed within this respect for a human concern for the sacred. As a consequence, its very methods were intrinsically bound to the power of illumination and the imagination, and

Photo 2: Mercurius as the sun-moon hermaphrodite (*rebis*) standing on the (round) chaos.
Source: From Mylius, *Philosophia reformata* (1622); reproduced in Jung's *Collected Works*, Vol. 12

> it especially applied the ideas of death and rebirth, so central to initiation rites and mystical experience, to material and psychological change.[26]

In alchemy, one has to be open to an Other dimension of existence. This Other is often referred to as God and is mediated by the shaman or the priest. Alchemists were "killed and reborn" through their experience of the *numinosum*.[27] Jung by applying the principles of alchemy to his practice of psychotherapy proposed the following parallels:

1. The idea of a unitary process—the self—which operates by creating equilibrium through manifesting compensatory images.
2. The idea of a conflict of opposites held together by this unitary and compensatory process.
3. The idea of the archetypes, which provide an underlying structure for the components of the psyche.
4. The belief that through projection and the imagination psyches can connect to and affect one another.[28]

PRIMA MATERIA AND HIEROS GAMOS

The alchemists proposed that the world is made out of *prima materia* or chaos. This *prima materia* may also be assumed to be the primal mother, and in Jungian psychoanalysis, the unconscious. Through the myths of Cybelle and Attis[29] or the dismemberment of Osiris, or the Christian concept of original sin the theme of impossible passion is held up. Like the Oedipus story alchemists believe in a sacred marriage between mother and son which they term as *hieros gamos*. Now we understand the image mentioned above by Forshaw in Frater Ulmannus of Lucifer and his mother—it is an image of the sacred marriage or the laboratory practice gone wrong. Jung writes in *Psychology and Alchemy*: "The mother, who was anterior to the

world of the father, accommodates herself to the masculine principle and, with the aid of the human spirit (alchemy or 'the philosophy'), produces a son—not the antithesis of Christ but rather his chthonic counterpart, not a divine but a fabulous being conforming to the nature of the primordial mother. And just as the redemption of man the microcosm is the task of the 'upper' son, so the 'lower' son has the function of a *salvator macrocosmi*."[30]

MYSTERIUM CONJUNCTIONIS

This sacred marriage, therefore, in psychotherapy is a reaching out to the pre-Oedipal consciousness. Jungian psychotherapy attempts to understand and access the unreachable unconscious through the alchemical myth of *mysterium conjunctionis*. This conjunction or marriage is not without its danger. It is an experience of the *numinosum* and may lead to an experience of God or the Devil.

Photo 3: The Conjunction
Source: From the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (1550); reproduced in Jung's *Collected Works*, Vol. 16

Alchemists theorize a state of *nigredo* that follows the conjunction. In *Rosarium Philosophorum* there is a woodcut of a hermaphrodite figure, resurrected from a previous dead state, and supported by a crescent moon.[31] This signifies not only a union of opposites, the male-female polarities of the hermaphrodite, but also an overcoming of psychic death related to the dread and terror of despair and abandonment.[32]

LAPIS OR THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The goal of the Great Work is to arrive at the stone by joining two materials by means of a third material. The dark coloured lead must be liquefied and its blackness reduced by joining it with a third material of medium colour. According to alchemical theory, by experiencing the *conjunctio* and the resulting *nigredo* over and over again, a new state could be reached, the 'whitening' of the *albedo*. The goal is the attainment of the *lapis* (the stone) which for the psychotherapist means 'the self'. This structure can be attained through an embodied self. This stage in which the passions are engaged, follows the 'whiteness' of the albedo and is known as the rubedo. Some sacrificial blood, some redness is needed for the full integration of the self. Jung explains the self-castration of Attis in the Cybelle-Attis myth as the sacrifice of the instinctual feelings for the Great Mother. It is the castration of the libido, both as the incestuous love of the son for the mother and of her incestuous love for him.[33] In psychotherapy the process of successful individuation is completed after such castration of the self. Between the analysand and his unconscious, the psychoanalyst is the third matter. It is essentially a process of psychic transference. The subject may lose himself by developing psychosis if he is unable to deal with the conjunction with the mother (unconscious). The psychotherapist must also be of stable self so that he is not psychically disturbed by the subject's revealed unconscious.

From such a preliminary understanding of alchemy and its Jungian interpretation we may look at Macbeth as a complex process of failed individuation leading to a break down in the hero's psyche. I would propose that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not only complementary but also compensatory psyches.[34] Lady Macbeth repeatedly questions Macbeth's manhood and that is a suggestion of his incomplete individuation and mother-fixation. The great number of baby images in the play reinforces this idea of lacking manhood. Macbeth is told to look like the innocent flower (I.v.65);[35] he imagines pity, a soft emotion, "like a naked new-born babe" (I.vii.21).[36] When Macbeth says "I dare do all that may become a man" (I.vii.46)[37] he means he cannot do anything inhuman but logically a baby is not a man. Here he feels castrated, powerless, and afraid like a baby.

Lady Macbeth takes upon or imagines herself in the role of the mother, sometimes of Macbeth when she chides him for childish fear of the painted devil:

> The sleeping, and the dead,
> Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a painted devil (II.ii.53-55);[38]

At other times she imagines or remembers her motherhood, a mother who kills her child:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
> As you have done to this. (I.vii.54-58).[39]

This reminds us of the image of Medea. Incidentally, Medea has often

been represented as an alchemist's guide.[40] This primal mother figure, who kills her son after union, is an alchemical image. This death may lead to destruction or to rebirth and renewal. Lady Macbeth, being actually a part of Macbeth (in the image of the hermaphrodite) can only hint at this primal mother. The true *prima materia* with which Macbeth has union (his unconscious) are the witches. They represent the pre-Oedipal chaos with which Macbeth must come to terms. He obviously fails in the task. He cannot even match Lady Macbeth and comments that she should bear male children only, thus identifying her as the contrasexual *anima* that must join with him (husband/son) in a mysterious conjunction. Just like the alchemist Jason died because he could not properly handle his *anima* in Medea, similarly Macbeth fails to handle his *anima* in Lady Macbeth.

In the case of Lady Macbeth, it is a pre-Oedipal father-fixation. She could not kill Duncan as he resembled her father: "Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't." (II.ii.12–13).[41] This confrontation with her unresolved pre-Oedipal consciousness may lead to her psychic disintegration. Instead of self-castration, necessary for transcendence of her nigredo, Duncan's blood, in the spilling of which she has a major role pushes her into Hell and she fails to attain the refined state of *rubedo*. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are failed alchemists and pay the price of experimentation gone wrong.

Now, Macbeth's desire gone awry or out of control in this case is, significantly that for the gold crown. Let us imagine that kingship here is the metaphorical substitution of the alchemical king. In the alchemical tradition the symbol of king and queen were also used to indicate the conjunction that would lead to the production of gold.[42] For Macbeth, the Alchemical King never rises out of his salt bath or *nigredo*.[43] Macbeth fails to reach the state of rebirth after alchemical death. The gold crown or kingship never leads to the resolution of his unresolved Oedipal crisis and he gets destroyed in the pursuit of his desire.

THE GOAL OF THEIR OPUS

Let us imagine that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are set on their alchemical project of finding gold: the crown, kingship or integrated psyche. All their desires are desperately channelled towards this goal, which should be the noble *opus* of any alchemist—purifying himself/herself through death and rebirth. From the beginning, something is amiss. The witches take hold of their imagination (The Macbeths can be clubbed together most of the times as one character split into two as Freud believed.)[44] The complete disorder in values, morals and ethics is rendered palpable by the 'fair and foul' ambivalent speech of the witches. Themes of equivocation, moral duplicity and political treachery reinforce the evil character of the Macbeth world. Instead of praying to God, as any alchemist should, they pray to and invoke evil spirits. The witches are aware of the melancholic journey on which Macbeth and his wife are to set out. They are part of *prima materia*, the original chaos in Macbeth's world and they set up an

Photo 4: The conjunction in gruesome form
Source: From *Turba Philosophorum* (1550);
reproduced in Jung's *Collected Works*, Vol. 12

appointment with him on the heath. Why this promptness, why this initiative on the part of the witches? This is because Macbeth fails to take control of his opus. In his case the incestuous wedding is with the witches or the dark forces of the *nigredo*; the *mysterium conjunctionis* is not with Lady Macbeth but with the most horrible unconscious. Lady Macbeth of course acts as a pseudo-mother by treating Macbeth like a child. But she and Macbeth are the same. Both of them will be engulfed by the horror of their unconscious psyche. There is an illustration in *Turba Philosophorum* (1550) of the conjunction in a gruesome form in which the alchemist has coitus with a great serpent. This picture is more appropriate for Macbeth.[45] We will examine how many alchemical stages of the ten mentioned by Simonds can be found in Macbeth.

The *divisio* or state of separation

Macbeth distinguishes himself from the rest as the elements divide themselves at creation. He carves out a passage for himself in the battlefield as expressed in the captain's report. The image of storm and thunder, fire and water are all present in this report. Macbeth "Like Valour's minion, carv'd out his passage" (I.ii.19),[46] symbolically standing for birth or creation and division of the four elements at the beginning of the alchemical process. Again, "As whence the sun 'gins his reflection, shipwracking storms and direful thunders break, . . . Discomfort swells." (I.ii.25-28)[47]

Salsatura or marination

After separation and division of elements the alchemist hero must undertake a bath for marination. In Macbeth's case it is a bloodbath: "Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds, / Or memorize another Golgotha," (I.ii.40-41)[48] Blood being saline, it is perfect substitution for brine water for the *salsatura* or marination stage.

However, there is deep irony in the evocation of Golgotha, shedding of Christ's blood as opposed to the unholy bloodbath here reinforcing the contrast between good and evil. Simonds interprets Prospero's statement "my charms crack not" as use of "crack", a keyword in alchemy "which often happened to alembics placed over too high a heat."[49] The captain reports "If I say sooth, I must report they were / As canons overcharg'd with double cracks;" (I.ii.36-37)[50] Clearly, the Captain means the cracking noise of the canons but where ambiguity and displacement are chief devices in language it won't be too wrong to read the echo of alchemical "crack" here. Besides, are we not expecting a double crack in the failure of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? They are not as adept magicians as Prospero as Macbeth says, "we are yet but young in deed." (III.iv.143)[51]

Nigredo or distraction (madness)

Is there a tempest in *Macbeth?* According to John S. Mebane the very title of *The Tempest* stands for the alchemical term for the "boiling

Photo 5: Salt Bath and Renewal of the Alchemical King.
Source: Reproduced from Simonds, "My charms crack not": The Alchemical Structure of "The Tempest". See Notes. Originally from Salomon Trismosin's *Splendor Solis* in Paracelsus, *Aureum vellus* (1598).

process which removes impurities from base metal and facilitates its transmutation into gold."[52] There is no occasion for such a storm in *Macbeth* but there is the possibility of a magical storm. The First Witch to prove her magical power asserts:

> I will drain him dry as hay:
> Sleep shall neither night nor day
> Hang upon his penthouse lid;
> He shall live a man forbid.
> Weary sev'n nights nine times nine,
> Shall he dwindle, peak and pine:
> Though his bark cannot be lost,
> Yet it shall be tempest-tost. (I.iii.18-25)[53]

From the outset Shakespeare gives us clues regarding the alchemical nature of the play. With this notion of boiling he weaves the idea of sleeplessness that will be a major element of the *nigredo* or suffering part of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The "tempest-tost", sleepless sailor is an early projection of Macbeth's *nigredo*. The alchemical image of boiling is further reasserted in the cauldron scene. The witches parody the boiling act of the alchemist in his furnace in the most repulsive way: "Double, double, toil and trouble:/ Fire, burn; and cauldron, bubble." (IV.i.10-11)[54] Do they refer to the double figure of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth here who must boil together in the state of *distractio* or madness during the *nigredo*?

In consoling Lady Macduff Ross uses the image of a stormy sea:

> when we hold rumour
> From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,
> But float upon a wild and violent sea
> Each way, and move (IV.ii.19-22)[55]

The conjuration of evil spirits by Lady Macbeth and of the witches

by Macbeth is a parallel to prayer by the alchemist to God before launching his project:

> Lady Macbeth: Come, you Spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
> stop th'access and passage to remorse; (I.v.40-44)[56]

This is an appeal for a successful *solve et coagula*. Later, before proceeding on the murder of Macduff's family and declaring war Macbeth seeks answer to his questions from the witches desperately. Does he sense that the experiment is going horribly wrong?

> Macb. I conjure you, by that which you profess,
> However you come to know it, answer me:
> (Iv.i.50-51)[57]

Macbeth's madness and melancholy in his state of *nigredo* or distraction has been displayed in the banquet scene and that of Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene.

> O! Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!
> Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.
> (III.ii.36-37)[58]

An anticipation of the terrible suffering clouds his mind:

> It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood:
> Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
> Augures, and understood relations, have
> By maggot-pies and choughs, and rooks, brought forth
> The secret'st man of blood. (III.iv.121-125)[59]

Macbeth's suffering is in the head, it is madness and melancholy:

> I am in blood
> Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
> Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
> Which must be acted, ere they may be scann'd.
> (III.v.135-139)[60]

Lady Macbeth in her *nigredo* is absorbed in the thought of blood. Her early boldness is gone. She is a wreck and finds herself in her conjured hell:

> Out, damned spot! out I say!—One; two: why, then 'tis time to do't.—Hell is murky—Fie, my Lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard?—What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to accompt?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (V.i.33-38)[61]

Dissolution and Condensation through Cooling *(solve et coagula)*

Boiling must be followed by cooling for the purpose of dissolution and thickening in alchemy. The witches do it with something gruesome:

> 2 Witch: Cool it with a baboon's blood:
> Then the charm is firm and good. (IV.i.37-38)[62]

Macbeth is boiling in his evil intent and does not want to cool:

> No boasting like a fool;
> This deed I'll do, before this purpose cool: (IV.ii.153-54)[63]

However, this stage and the next stages never arrive for our protagonists

in *Macbeth* because these are stages of purification and rebirth. In *The Tempest* during their period of madness and grief the members of the court party are repeatedly dissolved and condensed into dew. This miraculous dew changes Old Adam into the New Adam.[64] However, in *Macbeth* the protagonists never experience this process of regeneration and they are destroyed in *nigredo*. Therefore the later stages of alchemical transmutation never take place in the play.

MACBETH: A FAILED ALCHEMICAL EXPERIMENT AND THE HORROR OF THE SELF

One may read *Macbeth* as a play delving with uncontrolled passion of two characters for something (gold crown) that leads to psychosis for one and somnambulism and insanity for the other. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not two but one character—the hermaphrodite in alchemical imagery, Lucifer and his mother in unnatural and unholy coitus.[65] In this drama of self-abuse and loss of self, one witnesses the violent dismemberment of Osiris or Attis. Macbeth loses his holistic integrity—suffers from fragmentation (hand and eye dichotomy) and says "my way of life/ Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf;" (V.iii.22-23).[66] His 'self' shrinks and dries up and an insurmountable gap is created between the two of them who were of one heart and motion in their desire. As Macbeth stands in the pool of blood, he sacrifices himself in vain. Even the death of his wife becomes meaningless: "She should have died hereafter:/ There would have been a time for such a word" (V.V.17-18).[67] All this blood ironically cannot help him achieve the *rubedo*. Unlike the god Dionysus who is accepted by the Bacchantes, the forces of the unconscious, he is merely torn apart by them. Simon must have immensely enjoyed this alchemical drama but whispered nothing about its secret to eternity.

NOTES

1 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* ed. Frank Kermode (London: Methuen, 1985), 35.
2 Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 2001), 182.
3 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Bloomsbury, 1984), 43.
4 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 43.
5 In Sonnet 33 he writes:

> "Full many a glorious morning have I seen / Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye, / Kissing with golden face the meadows green, / Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;"

In Sonnet 114 he writes in a similar sense:

> "Or whether doth my mind, being crown'd with you, / Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery? / Or whether shall I say, mine eye saith true, / And that your love taught it this alchemy, / To make of monsters and things indigest / Such cherubins as your sweet self resemble, / Creating every bad a perfect best, / As fast as objects to his beams assemble?"

In *Julius Caesar* we find a similar use:

> "O, he sits high in all the people's hearts:/ And that which would appear offence in us,/ His countenance, like richest alchemy,/ Will change to virtue and to worthiness" (I.iii.157-60).

In *King John* also Shakespeare uses alchemical imagery:

> "the glorious sun / Stays in his course and plays the alchemist, / Turning with splendor his special eye / The meager cloddy earth to glittering gold," (III.i.77-80).

6 Stanton J. Linden, 'Francis Bacon and Alchemy: The Reformation of Vulcan', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1974): 547-60, 547. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2709085 Accessed: 28 March, 2020.
7 Peggy Muñoz Simonds, ' "My charms crack not": The Alchemical Structure of "The Tempest" ', *Comparative Drama*, 31, no. 4 (Winter 1997-98): 538-70, 538. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41153887 Accessed: 28 March, 2020.
8 Simonds, ' "My charms crack not" ', 540.
9 The Latin terms of the stages of the *opus* may be translated in this way: separation, marination, putrefaction and distraction, dissolution and condensation, the women washing sheets and dyeing, the peacock's tail, the chemical wedding, squaring the circle, dawning and perfection. Simonds, '"My charms crack not"', 542.
10 Peter J. Forshaw, 'Isn't alchemy a spiritual tradition?', *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism* eds. Wouter Hanegraaff, Peter Forshaw and Marco Pasi, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, 105-12, 107.

https://www.academia.edu/39836074/Isnt_alchemy_a_spiritual_tradition Accessed: 28 July 2020.

11 Forshaw, 'Isn't alchemy a spiritual tradition?', *Hermes Explains*, 107.

12 Forshaw, 'Isn't alchemy a spiritual tradition?', *Hermes Explains,* 107.

13 *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885-1900), Vol.19 "Simon Forman" by Sidney Lee. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Forman,_Simon_(DNB00) Accessed: 27 July, 2020.

14 Ashmole was also a Freemason. The following is quoted from *Wikipedia*:

> "He referred to himself as the son of William Backhouse, who adopted him in 1651 as his spiritual son—for the connection he gave him to the long spiritual chain of hermetic wisdom that Backhouse was part of. According to Ashmole, Backhouse 'intytle[d] me to some small parte Of grand sire Hermes wealth [sic]'".

15 *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 2 "Elias Ashmole" by Richard Garnett. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ashmole,_Elias_(DNB00) Accessed: 27 July, 2020.

16 Linden, 'Francis Bacon and Alchemy', 547-560.

17 Andreas Christianus, *Disputationes duae: prior, de somno et vigilia: posterior: de comate seu cataphora* (Basel, 1583).

18 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 148.

19 Forshaw, 'Isn't alchemy a spiritual tradition?', *Hermes Explains*, 108.

20 Oswald Croll (c. 1563-1609) was an alchemist and professor of medicine at the University of Marburg in Hesse, Germany. A strong proponent of alchemy and using chemistry in medicine, he was heavily involved in writing books and influencing thinkers of his day towards viewing chemistry and alchemy as two separate fields. Croll received his doctorate in medicine in 1582 at Marburg, then continued studies at Heidelberg, Strasburg, and Geneva. In 1608, Croll's opus magnum "Basilica Chymica" ("Chemical Basilica") was first published. It is a hefty summary of his researches, methods of preparation, and studies into chemical medicine or iatrochemistry. In 1609 his treatise "De signatura rerum" ("Treatise of signatures") was published. Some of his work pushed for the understanding and recognition of chemical compounds and medicinal value of herbs and other processes first put forth by Paracelsus.

21 Peter J. Forshaw, '"Paradoxes, Absurdities, and Madness": Conflict over Alchemy, Magic and Medicine in the Works of Andreas Libavius and Heinrich Khunrath', *Early Science and Medicine*, 13, no.1 (2008): 53-81, 63. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20617709 Accessed: 28 March, 2020.

22 See Illustration 1 AMPHITHEATRUM.

23 Paracelsus, *Astronomia magna: oder die gantze philosophia sagax der grossen und kleinen Welt,* ed. Michael Toxites (Frankfurt, 1571), Lib. 1, sigs. 60^{v}-63^{v} "Probatio Particularis in Scientiam Signatam"; sigs. 63^{v}-66^{r} "Probatio in Scientias

Artium Incertarum." On the 'Conjectural arts or sciences,' see Maclean, *Logic*, 315-326. On Signatures, see Massimo Luigi Bianchi, Signatura *Rerum: Segni, Magia e conoscenza da Paracelso a Leibniz* (Rome, 1987); Wilhelm Kühlmann, "Oswald Crollius und seine Signaturen lehre: Zum Profil hermetischer Naturphilosophie in der Ära Rudolphs II," in *Die okkulten Wissenschaften in der Renaissance, Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen zur Renaisssanceforschun*g, ed. A. Buck (Wiesbaden, 1992), 103-23.

24 Forshaw, '"Paradoxes, Absurdities, and Madness"', 67.

25 Forshaw, '"Paradoxes, Absurdities, and Madness"', 68.

26 Jung, *Jung on Alchemy*, 5.

27 Jung, *Jung on Alchemy*, 6.

28 Jung, *Jung on Alchemy*, 13.

29 "In Ovid's tale, Attis, at the outset, has attracted Cybelle to him by his vow of 'chaste passion' in service to the goddess. But upon falling in love with a nymph named Sagaris, Attis breaks his vow, and Cybelle takes vengeance, killing the nymph. This causes Attis to go mad. He flees to the top of Mount Dindymus, raving in hallucinatory terrors. He then turns upon himself in the most terrible way: 'He mangled, too, his body with a sharp stone.' And in the midst of his self-mutilation, he cries out as one whose guilt is overbearing: 'I have deserved it! With my blood I pay the penalty that is my due' (Ovid, Fasti, iv.237-39)". *Jung on Alchemy*, 30.

30 Jung, *Jung on Alchemy*, 25-26.

31 See Illustration 2 HERMAPHRODITE.

32 Jung, *Jung on Alchemy*, 35.

33 Jung, *Jung on Alchemy*, 37-38.

34 Freud also believed Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to be a single entity split into two. "Shakespeare often splits a character up into two personages, which, taken separately, are not completely understandable and do not become so until they are brought together once more into a unity. This might be so with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth." From Sigmund Freud, *Some Character-types Met With In Psycho-analytical Work* (1916).
http://mrmullen.pbworks.com/w/page/11313751/Freud%20on%20Macbeth
Accessed: 28 July, 2020.

35 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 32.

36 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 39.

37 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 41.

38 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 55.

39 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 42. A Freudian reading also finds the Oedipal Lady Macbeth in the role of mother: see Stephen Leo Carr and Peggy Knapp, "Seeing Macbeth," *PMLA* 96 (1981): 837-47.

40 "Insofar as we can know, Medea has always been multiple, existing in many

different versions simultaneously. She is never simply a literary construction, a stratified intertextual ensemble made up of all the other literary Medeas that came before her, but a product of the values and fears of each culture that imagines her, recreates her, and uses her to represent meaning. The Middle Ages were no different: Medea could figure as an alchemist's guide, as in the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* (the *New Pearl of Great Price*); as an allegory of God fighting the Antichrist in the *Ovide Moralisé*; as wronged wife in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women;* or as a nightmare figure that appears like Grendel in *Beowulf* to destroy Jason's wedding feast." See Raoul Lefèvre's *History of Jason. Ramus* 41, no. 1-2 (2012): 190-205.
https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ramus/article/epilogue-the-multiple-medeas-of-the-middle-ages/550B8FB71909A9C095BC26FB04466D6A Accessed: 28 July, 2020.

41 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 52.
42 Illustration 3 MYSTERIUM CONJUNCTIONIS.
43 Illustration 4 SALT BATH AND RENEWAL OF THE ALCHEMICAL KING.
44 See note 33 above.
45 Illustration 5, Jung p.35.
46 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 7.
47 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 7.
48 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 8.
49 Simonds, *'"My charms crack not"'*, 555–56.
50 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 8.
51 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 98.
52 John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 181. Cited in Simonds, '"My charms crack not"', 542.
53 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 13-14.
54 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 106.
55 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 118-19.
56 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 29-30.
57 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 109.
58 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 83.
59 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 96-97.
60 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 98.
61 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 139.
62 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 108.
63 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 116.
64 Simonds, '"My charms crack not"', 550.
65 This idea of the complementarity of the two characters has been expressed before in a different language: "Macbeth manifests a fatal con-fusion between

"feminine" otherness and "masculine" ambition. One controls and expresses the other, but which is which? Like the embrace of two spent swimmers, the intimate bond of (female) other and (male) desire becomes one of unstable support and struggle. It threatens to degenerate into a process of de-differentiation. Like the witches unsexed Lady Macbeth, or unmanly Macbeth, both agencies (other and desire) are of neither gender, or of both. Complementarity here threatens to collapse into critical mass." David Willbern, 'Phantasmagoric "Macbeth"', *English Literary Renaissance* 16, no. 3, New Perspectives on Shakespeare (AUTUMN 1986): 541

66 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 145-46.

67 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 152-53.

The Voice of Reason: Archbishop Abbot on the Essex Divorce Case

SOMNATH BASU

Speaking truth to power is a practice that has often landed speakers in trouble, and, in the early modern period, with its profusion of monarchs believing themselves to be divinely anointed to rule, a courtier or functionary who asserted a viewpoint opposed to that of the monarch was almost certain to incur severe consequences ranging from the loss of favour to the loss of life.

Under these circumstances, it is remarkable that George Abbot, who was Archbishop of Canterbury for the greater part of the reign of King James I of England (he served from 1611 to 1633, therefore also holding that position after Charles I ascended the throne), respectfully but firmly opposed the divorce of Frances Howard from her husband Robert Devereux, the 3rd Earl of Essex, on the grounds of impotency, because the divorce was something that James I avidly encouraged because he had agreed to let Howard marry his current favourite Robert Carr, who was later created Earl of Somerset.

This essay will examine the correspondence between James I and Archbishop Abbot on this matter, in order to demonstrate how Abbot attempted a rational inquiry (as far as rationality went in that period) into a subject that was widely believed in by virtually every social class in England at that time, and also how his language negotiates his political obligations to James I and his own position as an arbiter.

In 1613, Frances Howard (later known as Frances Carr), petitioned for an annulment of her marriage to Robert Devereux, the 3rd Earl of Essex, to whom she had been married in 1604, when she was fourteen years old. The grounds for claiming the annulment was the non-consummation of the marriage, with Howard claiming that her

husband was impotent.[1] The earl denied the charges, claiming that he was perfectly capable of intercourse with other women, but that Howard had never allowed him to consummate the marriage. Since Howard wanted the annulment in order to marry Robert Carr, who was the current favourite of James I, James took a personal interest in the case and tried to use his influence to secure the annulment. As the Archbishop of Canterbury was one of the authorities who could rule on the matter, James put pressure on George Abbot, who was the Archbishop at that point in time, to agree to the annulment, going so far as to suggest that perhaps the Earl of Essex was under the influence of witchcraft, which made him unable to consummate his marriage to his wife.

However, Abbot refused to be pliant. In a letter written to James I that year, a copy of which is part of the Thomas Murray Papers (MS 663) of Lambeth Palace Library, and which was reprinted as part of a larger pamphlet, *The Case of Impotency as Debated in England,* published by the notorious publisher Edmund Curll in 1715, he takes a very rational stand on the matter, not only demanding proof of such witchcraft, but also refuting points made in favour of the idea that witchcraft was involved. In spite of Abbot's opposition, the divorce was approved by the other judges appointed by the king to hear the matter. Therefore, although Abbot did not succeed in preventing the annulment of the marriage, his arguments against it remained on record, providing powerful testimony of the fact that there were valid reasons to oppose the divorce, and, by extension, the will of the monarch.

The Case of Impotency was published almost two hundred years after Abbot's death. It was Abbot's personal manuscript account of the Essex case, probably completed in October 1613, after the final judgement on the matter had been pronounced. The long delay in publication was presumably caused by the fact that Abbot would not have cared for his opinions to be circulated in print during his lifetime for fear of reprisal, and that his manuscript was then archived

before it was obtained by Curll for publication—in all likelihood from a lawyer residing at the Inner Temple in London, if the preface of the book is to be believed. Curll's interest in the book may have arisen due to a recent spate of publicly discussed divorces, and he states in the preface to this volume that this book had been published given the interest aroused by the recent divorce case of the Marquis of Gesvres.[2] This essay will focus primarily on the two letters and the material that immediately preceded or succeeded them in Volume 1 of the book brought out by Curll.

Abbot's letter to James I, where he argues against the granting of the divorce, is a short one, but it is very clearly expressed. It runs from Pages 139 to 142 in the printed volume, but is preceded by a list of six points by Abbot where he questions certain details of the divorce case, especially the points made by Howard in the formal application (here called a "libel") for the divorce. The letter is followed by a series of quotations in Latin from various ecclesiastical and civil law scholars about divorce supporting the Archbishop's position—authorities cited included Theodore Beza, Philip Melanchthon, and Girolamo Zanchi. The fact that at least two of these authorities were among the leading Protestant theologians of their times would not have been lost on the readers of these opinions, making Abbot's points even harder to refute, since they were backed up by such authority.

Abbot's reasons for opposing the divorce were manifold: there were both pragmatic and ideological grounds. In political terms, this represented a clash between the powerful Devereux and Howard families, and it was compounded by the personal interest taken by James I in the affair. In addition, as Cyndia Susan Clegg points out:

> How durable was the bond between king and subject if the King himself could insist upon the dissolution of the like bond between husband and wife? Not surprisingly, James's insistence in 1613 on the divorce of Frances Howard from

> Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex, so that Lady Essex would be free to marry the King's favorite, Robert Carr, met with opposition. Those who opposed the divorce, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbot, understood only too well the implications that such an assault on the institution of marriage held for patriarchal authority.[3]

Divorces on flimsy grounds that had royal support also had royal precedent: the two divorces of Henry VIII were not even a century old when the Essex divorce case began. During Henry VIII's first divorce (with Catherine of Aragon), his first minister Cardinal Wolsey had found himself in a similar moral and political dilemma—the over-riding factor being the fact that Catherine was the aunt of Charles V, the King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor, who was keeping the Pope Clement VII under virtual house arrest in Rome in 1527, when the divorce proceedings had been instituted and which required the assent of the Pope, who could hardly offend his captor so blatantly. While Abbot did not have to worry himself about international consequences due to his handling of the Essex divorce case, some of the arguments debated during the Catherine of Aragon divorce raised themselves here—the question of an unconsummated marriage being the principal one.

Abbot's objections can be divided into two groups: first, his doubts about the accusation that the Earl of Essex was impotent and that Frances Howard was a virgin, and second, his dismissal of the suggestion that witchcraft had been worked upon the Earl to render him impotent when he was with his wife. Regarding the alleged impotence of the Earl, Abbot wrote a personal memorandum on the matter, published in *The Case of Impotency* in a section headed "Doubts conceived out of the Fact and Process, in the Suit between the Lady Frances Howard, and the Earl of Essex." In it, he states four points, the two crucial ones being:

> III. Whether in this Case my Lord of Essex his Oath (*cum Septem manu propinquorum*) be not by Law requisite as well as my Ladies.
>
> IV. Whether my Lord of Essex should be inspected by Physicians, to certify (so far as they can by Art) the true Cause and Nature of the Impediment.[4]

This was a response to the fact that Frances Howard had apparently been inspected by a group of ladies from the court to ascertain whether she was a virgin, and they had reported that she was one. In this, Abbot may be displaying a common failing, described thus.

> Men often proved a skeptical audience for these narratives, fearing that women could use the ambiguity of the female body to falsify virginity in order to further their own agendas. Nevertheless, men were frequently forced to depend on women's potentially unreliable words, behavior, and appearance for "proof" of physical and moral integrity.[5]

Abbot is also sceptical of the assertion that the Earl of Essex was impotent when it came to his wife and not to other women, as, in a speech that was delivered on 25 September 1613 during the formal divorce hearing, he states that, "No Memory of Man can express unto me the Name of that Person, whose Marriage was annull'd for Impotency towards his Wife, when he found an Ability of carnal Copu|lation with any other Woman."[6]

Regarding witchcraft, Abbot was clear that not only did he not believe that witchcraft had been practised in this case, but also that he believed that it was not possible that impotence on account of witchcraft could ever be regarded as grounds for divorce. To this end, he writes:

> Now admit the Earl of Essex might be imagined to be troubled with *Maleficium versus hanc*, I demand what Alms have been given? What fasting hath been used, what Prayers have been pour'd out to appease the Indignation of God towards him, or his Wife, or what Physick hath been taken, or Medicine applied for Eight Years together? Not one of these things; but the first Hearing must be, to pronounce a Nullity in the Marriage. Of which Declaration we know the Beginning, but no mortal Man's Wit can foresee the End either in his Person, or the Example.[7]

Abbot is also sceptical of the fact that witchcraft is at all applicable in this case, because, drawing on his knowledge of recorded history, he states that:

> But since the Light of the Gospel is now in so great Measure broken out again, why should I not hope; but those who have embraced the Gospel, should be free from this *Maleficium?* especially since amongst a Million of Men in our Age, there is not one found in all our Country, who is clearly and evidently known to be troubled with the same. And if there should be any that might seem to be thus molested, we are taught to use two Remedies against it; the one spiritual Physick, the other external.[8]

Therefore, Abbot is seen to approach the question of witchcraft with a demand for proof that it was actually used, as well as a parallel demand to know whether the standard measures authorized by the Church in those times—fasting (the physical action) and prayer (the spiritual action)—had been tried out by both parties. While Abbot does not forsake a belief in witchcraft—that would

be extraordinary for those times, especially in the circles of a court whose head not just believed in but wrote about witches in detail—he nevertheless tries to show that the alleged effects of witchcraft on marital life have no historical documentation to support them, and that it is impossible to take a single person's assertion (especially if that person is a woman) as inviolable proof of such witchcraft. Abbot also makes it clear that he has seen nothing in the divorce libel that explicitly supports Frances Howard's assertions, and that the Earl of Essex had testified clearly that he did not lack virility, especially when it came to other women, so he failed to see why he could be impaired when it came to his own wife. While Abbot's language towards Frances Howard can be justifiably criticized as patronizing, it is also clear that the content of his arguments is carefully framed and backed up with evidence which Abbot thinks is solid enough to prove his points.

The legal opinions appended at the end of Abbot's letter are by standard legal authorities accepted in that time period, all of which declare that being affected by witchcraft is not sufficient cause for divorce.[9] By citing such well-regarded authorities (as James I's reply shows, even he does not challenge them, but uses another standard trick—co-option—to get around them), it can be argued that Abbot hoped that the king would realize that it was legally impossible to justify the divorce: any resolution in favour of the annulment would take place because the king wanted it and not because the law allowed it. Abbot may have been aware at this point that the divorce would be allowed because a majority of the other judges appointed by James I to decide on the matter would agree with the king's position—even if they were bishops who were under the direct authority of Abbot in his position as Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England (even today, the Archbishop of Canterbury's official title includes the phrase, "Primate of All England"). In that way, Abbot's learned opinions went in vain, and he suffered through the loss of royal

favour to him and his family till Robert Carr lost his position due to the Overbury poisoning case.[10]

The response by James I was acerbic. The tone of the letter written by him to Abbot makes it clear that the king was furious with Abbot for resisting his explicitly stated desire that the divorce be approved. The reasons are printed without any salutation: the lack of that may be the decision by the publisher to leave it out, or it may be an indication of James' irritation with Abbot in skipping pleasantries and coming directly to the point. This letter tries to be a point-by-point refutation of Abbot's letter, and James I repeatedly reminds Abbot that the doubts raised are Abbot's own, and not shared by his fellow judges, the king, or, for that matter, any rational person. This is highlighted through the use of phrases like, "your . . . question", "your. . . arguments", "your. . . argument, or rather, hope" and "your conclusion".[11] James argues that Scripture alone contains solutions to every conceivable problem, that Scripture permits divorce on the grounds of non-consummation of a marriage, that the Church Fathers and other ecclesiastical authorities must have pronouncements regarding divorce on such grounds (they only need to be searched for, but the search is not important, because marriage was originally a matter of civil law, so the early Christians did not concern themselves with it), that witchcraft exists without question, that it certainly can affect men by making them impotent (albeit selectively), that Abbot cannot tell for certain if the Earl or Frances Howard have not resorted to remedies such as prayer and fasting (which James claims are unnecessary anyway), and finally, that the opinions of the legal authorities cited by Abbot support James' contention that *maleficium versus hanc*, divorce on the grounds of witchcraft targeted against a specific individual, were grounds enough to grant an annulment.

James ends with a scathing reprimand to Abbot to concern himself only with the question put to him and not concern himself with the legalities of the case, writing: "As for the legal Doubts of formality,

they concern none of your Calling. If your Conscience be resolved in the Points of Divinity, it is your part to give your consent to the Nullity, and let the Lawyers take the burthen of making it formal."[12] The reply shows that James is not interested in the content of the questions raised by Abbot: his purpose is to steamroller any opposition raised by Abbot by providing any possible refutation to Abbot's points, even if the refutations do not make logical sense or are mere rhetorical flourishes seeking to distract attention from the principal issue. As Andrew Hadfield argues when he says that Abbot knew that James I was lying, "It is equally clear that James knows exactly what he is accused of and he does all he can to put pressure on Abbot to grant the annulment."[13]

The question of witchcraft is approached by James I with even more confidence due to his assertion of being a self-professed expert on the subject (note the assurance in the phrase, "Look my *Demonology*").[14] He insists that Satan can have sufficient power in this world, and that there are examples from the Creation onward about the malevolent powers of devils and their human agents, witches ("For as sure as God is, there be Devils, and Devils must have some Power, and their Power is in this World, (for *Satan* is the Prince of this World))."[15] James attempts to provide multiple justifications for his arguments that witchcraft is involved in the Essex case and that it specifically targets the Earl of Essex's virility. He cites the Old Testament's account of the protection of Sarah (the wife of the patriarch Abraham) from abuse by God through turning her would-be molester into a eunuch, and goes on to draw an analogical conclusion by claiming that Satan merely copied this action of God, but for evil ends, by rendering the Earl of Essex *inhabile*, impotent.[16] Similarly, while refuting Abbot's point that there is no mention of divorce granted on the grounds of impotence caused through witchcraft in classical and ecclesiastical sources, James argues that this kind of malevolence may have been a new kind of innovation, as "it is very probable (as I said before)

that this Trick of *Maleficium* had not then been put in Practice in the World, and therefore not known, nor mentioned by them; for why may not the Devil find out as well new Tricks of Witchcraft, when God will permit him, as he doth daily new sorts of Heresies? for his Malice can never end, till the End of Times."[17] It is worth noting once again that these refutations never provide any real rebuttal, content-wise, to the points raised by Abbot: instead, they are a set of superficial responses that seem to serve their purpose, but, in reality, they do not.

James' anger at Abbot may have been exacerbated by the fact that he expected Abbot, whom he had appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury over the heads of more senior bishops, would be more complaisant. As S. M. Holland points out with reference to Abbot's actions during the Essex divorce case:

> James's sense of outrage on that occasion was expressed in his amazement that "you, who are so far my creature" should contradict him, particularly since he had been able to persuade the normally high-minded Andrewes to agree to the annulment. James was to discover that in matters of morality Abbot lived up to Horace's ideal of "the just man" as one who "tenacious of his purpose will not be shaken from his set resolve by the inflamed citizenry demanding wrong nor by the impending face of a tyrant."[18]

The philosopher Michel Foucault re-defines the concept of *parrhesia* in terms of power relations, by suggesting that true *parrhesia* is only possible when the speaker indulging in this act places herself/himself in great danger (including the peril of one's life) in order to speak freely. Foucault also suggests that *parrhesia* is speech without adornment: the speaker deliberately uses the most direct language possible to stress the urgency and the importance of what is being said.[19] I argue that, through his defiance of James I's explicitly

worded letter asking him to agree to the divorce, Abbot displays the characteristics of a truly parrhesiac speaker, making his act of resistance a significant marker of the limits of the royal hegemony in early modern culture. The fact that this was not a one-off incident is borne out by the fact that Abbot was later reprimanded and punished by both James I and Charles I for opposing their actions on various occasions in the 1620s.

However, Abbot still attempts to tread as carefully as possible, while remaining direct in his language. His letter, the list of reasons, and even his account of his meetings with James I, other courtiers and clergymen, and above all the Earl of Essex himself, are written such that every argument put forward by him is backed up by proof and every refutation of an opponent's point is matched with a demand for evidence in favour of the opposing point: the questions of the Countess of Essex's virginity and the Earl of Essex's potency are cases in point. It is also worth noting that he still paid a price for this defiance: Archbishop Neile of York received more royal favour after that, while Abbot's brother Robert was not raised to the see of Lincoln till Abbot was reconciled with the king a few years later.[20]

Abbot's approach to the allegations of witchcraft in the Essex divorce case is surprisingly devoid of the irrational belief in the omnipotence of witches that dominated the public imagination at that point in time. While recognizing witchcraft to be the handiwork of the devil, Abbot's quest for explicit signs of such witchcraft foreshadows in some ways the inductive method of scientific investigation that would be promoted by the Royal Society within a few decades. Abbot is also cautious because, as mentioned earlier, he was aware that James I was lying, but did not possess the means or the scope to publicly vouch that.[21] Above all, of course, he was questioning the belief of a king who not only believed in witchcraft, but had written (or published under his name) a tract dealing with witchcraft and its exorcism. With further reference to Abbot's reaction to the witchcraft allegations, it is notable that Abbot does not recommend a detailed

examination by ecclesiastics into the probable means through which such witchcraft was taking place: in conventional circles, ecclesiastical investigation of the witchcraft would be a common practice. Instead, he recommends practices like regular prayer and fasting.[22]

In contrast, James I appears to have no qualms in directly contradicting Abbot without offering any clear evidence in support of his arguments, because he is aware that the most compelling justification he possesses is his own royal authority, which, according to him, is absolute. It is for this reason that Foucault argues that what a tyrant says cannot qualify as parrhesia, because the tyrant does not risk any danger in uttering whatever he/she wants to say.[23] Moreover, James' attitude to witchcraft reflects the commonly held acceptance of the fact that witchcraft did exist and that witches were capable of causing almost limitless harm to their victims if they chose to do so. This is ironic to us, since James prided himself on his knowledge of the sciences and philosophy, though his critics labelled him the "wisest fool in Christendom."[24]

Therefore, the exchanges between Abbot and James I represent a conflict between the well-reasoned arguments of a scholar and ecclesiastic about an action that he felt would undermine the institution of marriage and the bonds on which the society of his times was structured, as opposed to the wilfulness of a monarch intent on having his immediate wish fulfilled at any cost—with consequences for anyone who dared to oppose his royal will. The questions of political and social morality raised are crucial to our understanding of the function and extent of royal power in early modern England, and by extension, in early modern Europe. While the citation of ecclesiastical teachings and legal opinions was common practice, in this case, we see Abbot being able to marshal his sources more effectively and produce the more persuasive argument—despite the eventual failure of his efforts. Furthermore, the scepticism shown towards accusations of witchcraft is one of the first known examples of such scepticism by such an eminent religious figure, and it looks

forward to the gradual eradication of belief in witchcraft that would gain pace over the course of that century.

NOTES

1 Alistair Bellany, "Frances Howard," *Oxford Dictionary of National Bibliography,* 23 September 2004. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/53028.

2 George Abbot, *The case of impotency, as debated in England, in that remarkable tryal, 1613. between Robert Earl of Essex, and the Lady Frances Howard, who, after eight years marriage, commenc'd a suit against him for impotency. Containing*
I. The whole Proceedings and Debates on both Sides.
II. The Report of the Seven Matrons appointed to search the Countess.
III. The Intrigue between Her and the Earl of Somerset, who after the Divorce married her.
IV. A Detection of some Politicks in the Court of King James the First.
Written by George Abbot, D. D. Lord Archbishop of Canterbury. In two volumes. 3rd ed., vol. 1, printed for E. Curll, at the Dyal and Bible in Fleetstreet, [1719], Preface. Downloaded from Eighteenth Century Collections Online, accessed 2 June 2020, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0123955155/ECCO?u=uokent&sid=ECCO&xid=7b058411.

3 Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13.

4 Abbot, 138.

5 Sarah D. Luttfring, "Bodily Narratives and the Politics of Virginity in 'The Changeling' and the Essex Divorce," *Renaissance Drama* (New Series) 39 (2011): 98.

6 Abbot, 102.

7 Abbot, 141-42.

8 Abbot, 141.

9 Abbot, 142-48.

10 Clegg, 204-06.

11 James I, "His Majesty's Answer to the Arch-bishop's Reasons", printed in Abbot, 149, 153-54, 156.

12 Abbot, 158.

13 Andrew Hadfield, *Lying in Early Modern Culture: From the Oath of Supremacy to the Oath of Allegiance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 106.

14 Abbot, 154. James I is supposed to have authored a work titled, *Daemonologie, In Forme of a Dialogie, Divided into three Bookes*, which was published in 1597. This work is assumed to be one of the sources used by William Shakespeare for

creating the characters of the three witches in *Macbeth*.

15 Abbot, 154.

16 Abbot, 151.

17 Abbot, 153-54.

18 S. M. Holland, "George Abbot: The 'Wanted Archbishop'," *Church History* 56, no. 2 (June 1987): 186-87.

19 Michel Foucault, *The Meaning and Evolution of the Word "Parrhesia": Discourse & Truth, Problematization of Parrhesia—Six lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley*, October-November 1983. Accessed 15 June 2020, https://foucault.info/parrhesia/foucault.DT1.wordParrhesia.en/.

20 Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, "The Ecclesiastical Policy of James I," *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 2 (April 1985): 192.

21 Hadfield, 106.

22 Abbot, 141.

23 Foucault, *Meaning and Evolution*.

24 Anthony Weldon, *The court and character of King James whereunto is now added The court of King Charles: continued unto the beginning of these unhappy times: with some observations upon him instead of a character/collected and perfected by Sir A.W.* London: Printed at London by R.I. and are to be sold by J. Collins . . . , 1651. Accessed 15 June 2020, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A65393.0001.001.

Friedrich Engels and Gothic Marxism: A Fairy-Tale Introduction

JAYSON ALTHOFER

> What I want to do is to reveal in a 'fairy story' or something like that those foreshadowings of the modern world that showed themselves in the Middle Ages; I want to uncover those spirits who knocked under the hard crust of the earth for release, buried beneath the foundations of churches and dungeons.
>
> Friedrich Engels, November 1839[1]

INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) was committed to thinking and acting on the thought of human liberation from various forms of burial. His own head was buried, as a young Calvinist, in Biblical supernaturalism, like the unburials of the Last Judgement. Aged 19, he reflected ironically on his pietistic upbringing: 'Do you not hear the trumpet, whose sound overturns the tombstones and makes the earth shake with joy so that the graves burst open?'[2] By his mid-20s, as a Communist and collaborator of Karl Marx (1818-1883), he was possessed of the vision that capitalist vivisepulture of the proletariat within the factory-system would impel a revolutionary surfacing: proletarian self-emancipation that breaks through that system. In-depth Bible studies had reinforced Engels's leitmotif of underground, insurrectionary knocking up against capitalism. The privileged son of a devout factory-owner, Engels was drilled in pietism and 'knew from childhood the real nature of the factory system', 'its darker side' of child-labour and deathly hypocrisy: 'no pietist would go to

hell for the ruin of one child more or less'.[3]

Precocious familiarity with Germany's rising manufacturers notwithstanding, Engels had still 'to find his own way through the labyrinth of contemporary religious, philosophical, political and literary trends, and in much painful soul-searching to rise above the religious convictions nurtured in him since early childhood'; thus he 'found it much harder than Marx to arrive at a progressive outlook'.[4] An 1842 poem co-written by Engels and Edgar Bauer, parodying politico-philosophical struggles between Young Hegelians and conservative opponents of Hegelianism, caricatured Marx in terms that nevertheless intimate Engels's admiration for his transgressive grandeur. Marx, 'a marked monstrosity', cavorts like a Gothic villain: 'As if to seize and then pull down / To Earth the spacious tent of Heaven up on high, / He opens wide his arms and reaches for the sky. / He shakes his wicked fist, raves with a frantic air, / As if ten thousand devils had him by the hair'.[5]

From sources including spooky Calvinism and Hegelian idealism—'The free-willed Spirit', in Engels and Bauer's spoof, 'would burst its bonds and flee / The foul confining dungeon of captivity'—Engels would construct, with Marx, a practical materialism that involved working-class struggle for self-release from confinement in literal and symbolic subterranean spaces.[6]

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

Engels's journey to revolutionary socialism, although labyrinthine, was as rapid as Marx's, as if also driven by hair-raising devils. In the 1850s Marx privately said that Engels was 'devilish QUICK in the uptake' and publicly recorded that he 'arrived by another road (compare his *Condition of the Working-Class in England*) at the same result as I'.[7] After fastening their friendship in 1844-45, Engels often took the lead in 'the labyrinth of the social and political problems of modern times'.[8] In 1864 Marx wrote to Engels, 'I invariably follow in

your footsteps'.[9] This accords with the exaggerated but fundamentally exact tribute that Stanley Edgar Hyman bestowed on Engels with regard to Marx's monsterpiece—*Capital*, volume 1 (1867): 'No one familiar with *Capital* can read *The Condition of the Working Class,* which preceded it by twenty-two years, without some degree of shock. Here, the reader discovers to his amazement, is everything of *Capital* but its economics'.[10] In the labyrinth of economic problems, too, Engels's emprise inspired Marx. Their 'constant exchange of ideas', Marx affirmed, dated from the 1844 publication of Engels's 'brilliant essay', "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" (written 1843).[11]

In 1860 Marx extolled Engels—'whom you must consider as my *alter ego*'—in imperative terms that should have made incontrovertible Engels's significance to Marx's authorial identity and their lifelong collaboration.[12] Yet Engels's body of work has long been ideologically flayed and buried alive for allegedly distorting Marx's ideas and legacy.[13] As Willy Maley identified in 1999, 'Engels simply isn't there in so much speculation on Marx' and so 'is one of the most awesome spectres of Marx'. Maley lampooned the travesty of Engels as 'Marx's ghostly double, the vulgar, scientific, custodian of the crypt'—'better dead than Fred'.[14] Since then, an Engelsian tendency in Anglophone Marxist scholarship has surfaced to newly decrypt Engels. John Bellamy Foster's "The Return of Engels" (2017) surveys the vicissitudes of his reputation, while the rising appreciation of his oeuvre is transforming Engels into a revolutionary revenant who merits closer attention and analysis.[15] Restorative investigations by Paul Blackledge and Foster himself, among others, have furthered the positive shape-shifting of Engels's afterlife by re-singularising his 'independent and important contributions' to co-writings with Marx and to 'the Marxist project'.[16]

Gothicism, supernatural figures and hauntological categories clearly mark secondary literature on Engels and his emergent 'return'. However, Engels's own burrowing into and borrowing from supernatural, Gothic and shock-horror literature from the

dawn of the industrial revolution to the early 1840s—the time of his first, life-changing encounters with Manchester, 'the shock city of the industrial revolution' (in Asa Briggs's acclaimed phrase) and with Marx's heaven-defying 'monstrosity'—remain relatively shadowy subjects. To contribute to Engels's return, this article demonstrates that his supernatural-Gothic imaginary constituted a definite mode of producing anti-capitalist critique. It implies the need for comprehensive reconstruction of how supernaturalism and Gothicism deepened, heightened and haunted Engels's imaginative and conceptual architecture. Engels's devilish-quick apparition helped to blaze Marx's descent into capitalist Hell, but in most critical articulation of Gothic Marxism, 'Engels simply isn't there'. Recently, for instance, Gregory Marks's otherwise perceptive observations about 'vampire capital' and 'the vampires and werewolves of Marx's imaginary' miss any reference to Engels, who raised the stakes on capitalist vampirism before Marx.[17] Here, the spectral unsaid of Engels resurfaces.

HORRIPILATION, PEDAGOGY, INCITEMENT

Marx's 'passion [for] the subterranean metaphor' and his visibilisation of monsters and spectres within Capital's endotic operations are well-documented.[18] Amedeo Policante noted in 2010 that 'the abundance of gothic metaphors in Marx's writings have [sic] not passed unnoticed by past commentators of *Capital*. Especially after the publication of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* [1993], there has been a growing interest on the role of the ghostly and the spectral within the general structure of Marxian thought'.[19] David McNally's *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (2011) is indispensable in this regard. However, as with other matters, so with spectres, monsters and denizens of the underworld: there is a dearth of sustained research into Engels's independent spectropoetics and its stimulus to Marx. To update Maley's aperçu, 'the low visibility

of Engels' in *Spectres of Marx*, despite Engels having anticipated 'the questions of spectrality and spiritualism with which Derrida was preoccupied', is replicated within Gothic Marxism.[20] Maley's musings on 'spectres of Engels' are important exceptions to the general neglect. Some scholars have broached rich supernatural and monstrous veins in Engels's early work. Christopher Kitson alights upon 'the "spectre" of Chartism' raised by Engels's 1844 review of Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843)—an unsung conjuration, compared with the spectacular notoriety of 'the spectre of Communism' in Marx and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (written 1847-48; hereafter *Manifesto*).[21] Engels and Marx were following a worthy precedent: Heinrich Heine's instrumentalisation of 'various spectral figures' for polemical and political ends.[22]

Hyman recognised that Engels's debut book, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1845; hereafter *Condition*), anticipated 'Marx's favorite image, "the vampire property-holding class" '.[23] More recently, Policante mentioned *Capital*'s quotation of Engels's "The English Ten Hours' Bill" (1850): 'the vampire [of Capital] will not lose its hold on him "so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited" '.[24] Marx portrayed the vampire's seizure of a male labourer ('him'), whereas in Engels's original piece vampirism metaphorised 'callously brutal exploitation of children and women'.[25] Engels's *détournement* of vampire tales contested bourgeois fairy tales—*Condition* quotes Andrew Ure's ideological reverie wherein child factory-workers became 'lively elves'—which he exposed as bloodthirsty apologias for the 'social murder' of workers and their families.[26]

Just as Richard C. Maxwell, Jr. argued that Gothicism functions as 'the vehicle of social commentary' and Jonathan Arac considered its 'compatibility with scientific intentions', Grace Kehler's reading of *Condition* as a 'documentary gothic' treatise addresses its 'mobilization of feelings for the purposes of public instruction and social reform', exemplifying 'highly innovative use of gothic

technologies to pedagogical ends'.[27] Like Kehler, Raphael Hörmann grasps the potential mobilising effect of 'gothic pathos': in a 'gothic socio-revolutionary poem' by Ferdinand Freiligrath, "Die Todten an die Lebenden" (July 1848), 'the appearance of the mutilated bodies of the dead proletarian revolutionaries is described in grim detail to incite the listeners to socio-revolutionary action'.[28]

Dead and mutilated bodies of the socially-murdered, many individually named, bestrew the pages of *Condition*. As for 45-year-old Ann Galway—'She lay dead beside her son upon a heap of feathers which were scattered over her almost naked body, there being neither sheet nor coverlet. The feathers stuck so fast over the whole body that the physician could not examine the corpse until it was cleansed, and then found it starved and scarred from the bites of vermin.'—Engels's *tableaux morts* may seem gratuitous, even exploitative, akin to scenes of excess, frisson or grotesquerie drawn by *der Schauerroman* (the shudder novel) or *le roman-charogne* (the novel of carrion or decaying carcasses).[29] By laying bare real-life horrors of England's industrialisation, Engels's *frénétique* accumulation of bodies embedded an incendiary theoretico-political charge against bourgeois society. That charge exploded with *Capital*'s incandescent revelation of an industrial-Gothic nightmare made all-too-real: 'The "House of Terror" for paupers of which the capitalistic soul of 1770 only dreamed, was realised a few years later in the shape of a gigantic "Workhouse" for the industrial worker himself. It is called the Factory. And the ideal this time fades before the reality'.[30]

DANTE, CARLYLE, ENGELS

'As with Dante, so for Marx the voyage through the sufferings of hell is essential if we are to acquire genuine knowledge of our world': David McNally proposes that Marx's reverence for Dante's *Inferno* meant *Capital* finding 'common ground with Gothic literature' that appeared in the dawn-shadows of the industrial revolution

and exploring infernal spaces of inhuman ordeal inside nihilating capitalism. McNally explains:

> Gothic tales owe much of their terror to their spatial settings: 'cellars, attics, chambers long closed off'. In the confines of such enclosed spaces, horror and death announce themselves. After all, what makes these claustrophobia-inducing spaces terrifying is that they are sealed off from life—from 'air, sunlight, human presence and care. They are repulsive in that they bespeak abandonment and unlife'. And so it is with the capitalist factory.

He concludes: 'If there is a Marxist Gothic, then, it is one that insists, amongst other things, on journeying through the night spaces of the capitalist underworld, on visiting the secret dungeons that harbour labouring bodies in pain'.[31] Leaving aside the Gothicism and supernaturalism teeming in Engels's earlier writings, detailed reading of *Condition* discloses all of those appalling settings, terrors and absences (fresh air, etc.), *in extremis*, which could be constellated under the designation of Engelsian Gothic.

'Unlife', too, arises in *Condition*—a prolepsis of contemporary fascination with zombies. Engels stressed that 'the earliest generations of mill workers suffered a kind of living death, their mortality of little concern as long as capital could draw labor from the countryside's dispossessed'.[32] From this eerie nexus, Engels's account in *Anti-Dühring* (1877-78) of Marx's handling of Hegel's concept of 'the negation of the negation'—in Blackledge's gloss, 'to make sense of the way that capitalism dehumanises people (the negation) but also of how, in rebelling against this condition, these dehumanised people create networks of solidarity that point towards a positive alternative to capitalism (the negation of the negation)'—heralds a species of living-dead rebellion against a society centred, but teeteringly, on the 'House of Terror'.[33]

The *Manifesto* and Marx's first preface to *Capital* argue, in David L. Pike's words, 'that if one could succeed in wedding the sensational appeal to truth of the descent to the underworld with a materialist analysis of the economic and social mechanisms responsible for producing those sensations, one could potentially create a revolution'.[34] The wedding of cataclysmic verisimilitude and materialist critique to foment revolutionary class-consciousness was proposed earlier, by Engels's Gothic pedagogy in *Condition*. Although McNally overlooks Engels, Marx's Dantean voyage was pioneered by Engels, for whom Dante was 'both the last poet of the Middle Ages and the first poet of modern times'.[35] Put more grandly, to recap Hyman, *Capital* can be construed, in its Gothic contents and code, as a monumental excursus on *Condition*. Engels's own sensational portrayal of capitalism's Mancunian underworld bespeaks Dante, and also Carlyle's katabasis in *Past and Present*—'Sooty Manchester, it too is built on the infinite Abysses'—which Engels reviewed in the year he began *Condition*.[36]

As though 'to uncover those spirits who knocked under the hard crust of the earth for release', Engels undertook a profound divining of modernity's newest depths—mass industry. England's industrial movement seemed sorcerous, 'causing giant cities [. . .] to spring up as if by a magic touch'.[37] Delving into Manchester, which materialised many 'a gothic nightmare' and which he 'learned to read [. . .] with his senses', Engels encountered the proletariat bound in a cave-like system linking home, workhouse and factory.[38] To explore Manchester, 'to wander outside of his class', Engels, as a German capitalist, depended on his Irish-immigrant proletarian lover, Mary Burns, with her intimate knowledge of the city's working-class environs and denizens.[39] Only with Burns 'as his surrogate Virgil (or maybe his Beatrice?)' could he crisscross this 'Dantesque underworld'.[40] Manchester's industrial heartland had noxious, volcanic bowels, as the French journalist Léon Faucher found in 1843: 'Amid the fogs which exhale from this marshy district, and the clouds of smoke

vomited forth from the numberless chimneys, Labour presents a mysterious activity, somewhat akin to the subterranean action of a volcano'.[41] Similarly, Engels adopted Adolphe Blanqui's 1837 coinage *la revolution industrielle*—'While the French Revolution tried out its great experiments on a volcano', Blanqui claimed, 'England tried out hers on the plains of industry'—*and* rendered England's industrial sorcery as earthshaking as deadly natural phenomena.[42] Industrialism appeared as a 'fierce whirlpool', a reified force, an unstoppable second nature. In Engels's reckoning, however, chaotic bourgeois hegemony would ultimately loosen 'the avalanche' of open class warfare and proletarian revolt.[43] Decades before Nietzsche exhorted decadent-bourgeois Europe 'to live dangerously! Build your cities under Vesuvius!' Engels, like Carlyle, inveighed against the gay abandon with which bourgeois society always-already constructs its conurbations upon metaphysical abysses and industrial infernos—precarity, like mortality, of no concern. The remarkable volume of 'factual information' arrayed and analysed by Engels substantiated 'his picture of a city balanced precariously over disaster'.[44]

Engels's 1844 reviews of Carlyle's *Past and Present* and Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-43) galvanised *Condition*'s mash-up of eldritch, monstrous and nightmarish tropes and episodes. Of all the books published in 1843 for England's 'educated society' (a readership with bourgeois basis and bias), Engels asserted, *Past and Present* 'is the only one which is worth reading' and 'strikes a human chord'.[45] Carlyle crafted a Gothic assemblage of the factual and the fantastic that he called 'real-phantasmagory'.[46] His Picturesque Tourist persona observed men at Manchester sitting 'in front of their Bastille'—a workhouse—'in a kind of torpor, especially in a silence'. They embodied a dehumanised quiescence or acedia more menacing than Chartist insurgency: 'There was something that reminded me of Dante's Hell in the look of all this; and I rode swiftly away'. Carlyle lamented, 'So many hundred thousands sit in workhouses'; Engels elaborated: 'In 1842 England and Wales counted 1,430,000

paupers, of whom 222,000 were incarcerated in workhouses—Poor-law Bastilles the common people call them'.[47]

The Picturesque Tourist's flight from 'their Bastille' as precipitously delivered him to another circle of Hell. The 1841 case at Stockport of parents who poisoned three of their children in the family's cellar-dwelling, because they were all starving, summoned up the Pisan prison-house of Count Ugolino and his children from *Inferno*, Canto 33: 'Yes, in the Ugolino Hunger-tower stern things happen'. Carlyle predicted that 'we here, in modern England', already inhabiting Dantean Abysses, are steaming towards a 'blacker gulf of wretchedness'.[48] *Condition* reported on starvation, demoralisation, murder, and emulated *Past and Present* in many other regards. 'For page after page, Engels [ventured] deeper into the abyss, vividly evoking the horror' of his descent 'into the ruined basements of the damned', and so Andy Merrifield summed up *Condition*: 'It's a story straight out of Dante, whose *Inferno* was well known to Engels'.[49]

SUBTERRANEAN PLOTS, TOTTERING SUPERSTRUCTURES

'Elements announcing the birth of a literature of the depths can be found at the end of the eighteenth century in the Gothic novel and in Sade', says Pierre Macherey in his study of 'figures of the man from below', notably 'the new figure of subterranean man'.[50] By the early 1840s a best-seller was born, namely *Les Mystères de Paris*. Sue's 'well-known novel', Engels witnessed, 'has made a deep impression upon the public mind, especially in Germany; the forcible manner in which this book depicts the misery and demoralisation falling to the share of the "lower orders" in great cities, could not fail to direct public attention to the state of the poor in general'.[51] For Macherey, 'Sue invented the poetic technique of the social supernatural [but] Marx failed to understand it'.[52] Macherey ignores Engels, whose review indicates that he was deeply aware of the public appeal of Sue's technique and the political potential of situating and instru-

mentalising the supernatural in contemporary urban settings. Marx admired Engels's sensational relation of Manchester's 'lower orders', which morphed Sue's social supernaturalism as well as Carlyle's real-phantasmagory towards Communism. Regarding what Macherey calls 'the development of visionary theories about the man from below', Heine's precedent, again, requires acknowledgement.[53] In 1842 Heine unearthed a 'powerful academy' that teaches 'revolution and overthrow' but 'as yet preserves [its] terrible incognito', living 'like a poor pretender in that ground-floor or cellar of official society': 'Communism is the name of the terrible antagonist [subverting] the *bourgeois régime*'. After the revolutions of 1848, Heine rightly underlined: 'Many a time and oft did I depict the demons who lurked in the lower depths of society, and who would come bursting up out of their darkness when the destined day should come'.[54] Unsurprisingly, then, the textuality of Marx and Engels's *Manifesto* bears birth-marks of such literature of the depths, especially the socially-supernatural 'irruption of subterranean man'.[55]

From Engels's teenage fantasy of retelling the modern world's birth from below, and his education in Gothic, Young Hegelian, Chartist, Communist and other 'academies', through *Condition*'s landmark politicisation of the vampire, the *Manifesto*'s spectropoetics and Marx's appropriation of his bourgeoisification of vampirism in *Capital*, to his 1887 prophecy of a global *Totentanz*—'a world war', 'the last dance of war'—Engels suffused his life's work with Gothic dreams and nightmares repurposed to advance uncanny symbols, concepts and arguments for proletarian revolution and classless society.[56] Despite his creativity, critical commentary on the *Manifesto*, whether published before or after Derrida's 1993 intervention, tends to acknowledge Engels only perfunctorily as its co-author, hardly tarrying with its collaborative genesis—virtually as if Marx wrote it without his 'alter ego'. Indeed, Engels's co-authorship sometimes vanishes. 'Marx, in the *Manifesto*, implicitly rewrites the text of the celebrated Goethian ballad *Der Zauberlehrling* (The Sorcerer's

Apprentice)': Policante implicitly assumes that Engels had no role in determining this 'variation introduced by Marx'.[57] Conversely, *Condition*'s 'fierce whirlpool' contains shades of the Apprentice's terrifying 'Wasserströme'. Leaving aside Engels's encyclopaedic knowledge of German folklore, poetry and other literature, his horripilating pictures of industrial capitalism's out-of-control magic and trauma, which historicise *Past and Present*'s exposés of shocking modernity (Carlyle shudders with England's 'enchantment', 'phantasmagory' and Poor-Law Bastilles), signal his penchant to air novel writing techniques with Marx amidst their *constant exchange of ideas*.

Engelsian lines, or labyrinths, of inquiry regarding Gothic Marxism plausibly spring from discourse analysis of the *Manifesto*. For example, Jonathan Arac has illuminated the suture between the *Manifesto* and Gothicism with reference to the Marquis de Sade's renowned 1799 reflections on Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe's Gothic fictions: 'these new novels in which sorcery and phantasmagoria constitute practically the entire merit [were] the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all Europe has suffered'. Sade inhabits Arac's insights into the symbolic architectonics and social intersections of 'the Gothic fiction that was so popular in the years following the fall of the Bastille' in 1789: 'these same years saw political writings filled with images of the tottering house of state. A Gothic code thus links several adjacent practices of discourse. To recall the pervasive power in the nineteenth century of Gothicism as an idiom of historical representation, think of the "spectre" that haunts Europe at the opening of *The Communist Manifesto*'. Arac's conclusion convinces: 'The use of such language by Marx and Engels suggests its availability for the most serious purposes and its compatibility with scientific intentions, a commitment to the truth, as best one understands it, about the historical depth of a given social situation'.[58]

For Engels and Marx, Gothicism was also available to confront

supernatural figments propagated by Communism's enemies. As Engels mobilised vampires and *vignettes frénétiques* to reveal monstrous dimensions within Ure's distortion of child labourers into 'lively elves', so he and Marx deployed Gothicism's transnational currency to 'openly, in the face of the whole world [. . .] meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism'.[59] The *Manifesto*, if not a 'fairy story', is certainly 'something like that', as James Martin's outline of its generic characters and contours indicates:

> From specters and witchhunts to sorcerers and workers 'enslaved by the machine' who then become capitalism's gravediggers, the *Manifesto* displays an array of Gothic images and spectral figures in order to display the tantalizingly 'hidden civil war' between the classes. Moreover, some things magically change into other things: in the transition to capitalism, feudal society 'goes up in smoke' [. . .] means of production transform into 'fetters' [. . .] bourgeois property relations become 'too narrow' for the forces they unleash, and workers metamorphose from commodities in a market to enemies of older classes, and then into a coalition against the bourgeoisie, a class and, finally, a party. In their explosiveness and destructiveness, these transformations are more unpredictably alchemical than intelligible sequences in a predetermined causal chain.[60]

Since yearning in 1839 to 'uncover those spirits who knocked under the hard crust of the earth for release', Engels had discovered the proletariat in the depths of modern society and, with Marx, divulged its volcanic valency. The *Manifesto* declares: 'The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air'.[61] In only eight years, Engels fulfilled and exceeded his wish 'to reveal in a "fairy story" or something like that those foreshadowings of the modern world that showed themselves

in the Middle Ages'. For the *Manifesto* poeticises in social-spectral nomenclature the emergence of bourgeois society—'the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society'—and then also foretells the social sorcery by which a new subterranean class's revolutionary irruptions could consummate the cause of classless society.[62] Like *Condition*, the *Manifesto* adapted Gothic horripilation for pedagogical *and* polemical purposes, to incite the living dead to unbury themselves collectively by revolution from below. The buried masses shatter this bourgeois world's hard, inhuman crust—in *Capital*, 'This [capitalist] integument is burst asunder' —and another world becomes possible.[63]

CODA: 'GROTTO GOTHIC'

Capital's first volume, Edmund Wilson surmised, represents a Gothic edifice whose 'crevices' admit 'the mists and the septentrional lights of German metaphysics and mysticism'; Francis Wheen proposed that it 'can be read as a vast Gothic novel'; and William Clare Roberts has proved that it is modelled on Dante's *Inferno*.[64] Given Marx and Engels's sustained critical dwelling on subterranean imagery, their work can be further explored and understood through the sub-genre of 'grotto gothic'. That is one of the evocative sub-categories formulated by Frederick S. Frank to parse Gothicism's manifold architectural foci and fetishes, some of which are named above by McNally and Arac.[65] Deborah McLeod, however, construes Frank's neologism as both too restrictive and too expansive: 'a "grotto gothic" is, according to Frank, "a Gothic novel which restricts most of its action to a single cavernous or natural, subterranean environment." He then notes that many novels have titles which designate caves, grottos, or interior enclosures. This is, of course, true, but so few (if any) authors encave their protagonists for the bulk of three, four or five volumes that the category is virtually useless'.[66]

Here, revelations of a subterranean class, confined, chained, enslaved and exploited in capitalism's enclosed underworld, and

of that class's potential irruption—the proletariat self-emancipating from Capital's caves—suggest that 'grotto gothic' is a useful category to probe the coruscating significance of environments *sou terrain* in Marx and Engels's Communist vision. Given more symbolic evidence, such as Percy Shelley's inspiration to Marx and Engels, not least Shelley's poetic politicisation of seismic imagery and his Prometheus's chthonic associations, as well as more literal speleology, namely their environmental, sociological and soteriological concern for generations of working-class families 'encaved' as denizens of baleful abodes—from *Condition*: 'Cellar dwellings are general' in Greater Manchester, with 'a very considerable portion of the population' un-living in 'subterranean dens'; and from Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*: 'man is regressing to the *cave dwelling* [...] in an estranged, malignant form [...] the cellar dwelling of the poor man is a hostile element [...] a place from which, if he does not pay, he can be thrown out any day. For this mortuary he has to *pay*. A dwelling in the *light*, which Prometheus in Aeschylus designated as one of the greatest boons, by means of which he made the savage into a human being, ceases to exist for the worker'—given such evidence, 'grotto gothic' might form a vital supplement to Gothic Marxism's strategies to uncover and critique the infra-ordinary caves, industrial and residential 'black sites' and ethical voids that pervade capitalist society.[67]

Marx and Engels's literary chiaroscuro showed workers, their families and class buried alive in infernal factories and basements of the damned. A grotto-gothic sensibility could throw into clearer relief their terrific understanding of how capitalism encaved the proletariat and how that encaved class embodies an irruptive, revolutionary potential, across the bulk of *Capital*'s three ground-breaking volumes—the first completed by the devilish Marx, the second and third drafted by him and finished by the quick and undead Engels.

NOTES

1 Citations of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are from their *Collected Works*, 50 volumes ([N.p.]: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), using the established acronym *MECW*, followed by the volume and page number(s), as per the reference for this epigraph: *MECW*2, 481-82.
2 *MECW*2, 70.
3 Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels: A Biography* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1936), 15.
4 Lev Golman and Vladimir Sazonov in *MECW*2, xiii.
5 *MECW*2, 336.
6 *MECW*2, 324.
7 *MECW*41, 215; and *MECW*29, 264.
8 General Introduction in *MECW*1, xvii.
9 *MECW*41, 546.
10 Stanley Edgar Hyman, "A Neglected Masterpiece," *The Centennial Review* 6, no. 1 (1962): 52.
11 MECW41, 546.
12 *MECW*41, 215.
13 See Paul Blackledge, *Friedrich Engels and Modern Social and Political Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 1-20.
14 Willy Maley, "Spectres of Engels," in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psycho-analysis, History*, ed. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (London: Macmillan, 1999), 23-25.
15 John Bellamy Foster, "The Return of Engels," *Monthly Review* 68, no. 10 (2017) https://monthlyreview.org/2017/03/01/the-return-of-engels/.
16 Blackledge, Engels, 18-20. Also see John Bellamy Foster, *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020).
17 Gregory Marks, "Metabolic Monstrosities: Vampire Capital in the Anthropocene," *The Wasted World* (blog), December 14, 2019, https://thewastedworld.wordpress.com/2019/12/14/metabolic-monstrosities/.
18 Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society and the Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008 [1990]), 47-48.
19 Amedeo Policante, "Vampires of Capital: Gothic Reflections between Horror and Hope," *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* (2010): 2, http://clogic.eserver.org/2010/Policante.pdf.
20 Maley, "Spectres," 23; and Willy Maley, "Communing with the Church: Revelation and Revolution in Engels' 'On the History of Early Christianity' (1894-95)," in *Writing the Bodies of Christ: The Church from Carlyle to Derrida*, ed. John Schad (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), 13.
21 *MECW*3, 447; *MECW*6, 481; and Christopher Kitson, *Legacies of the Sublime: Literature, Aesthetics, and Freedom from Kant to Joyce* (Albany: State University of New York, 2019), 27-28.

22 Jörg Kreienbrock, "Popular Ghosts: Heinrich Heine on German *Geistesgeschichte* as Gothic Novel," in *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and its International Reception*, 1800-2000, ed. Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), 123.
23 Hyman, "Neglected Masterpiece," 52, quoting Engels.
24 Policante, "Vampires," 6n., quoting Marx.
25 *MECW*10, 288.
26 *MECW*4, 330, 458.
27 Maxwell, Jr. quoted in Jonathan Arac, *Commissioned Spirits: The Shaping of Social Motion in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville, and Hawthorne* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989 [1979]), 124n.; Arac, *Commissioned Spirits*, 125; and Grace Kehler, "Gothic Pedagogy and Victorian Reform Treatises," *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 3 (2008): 439, 443.
28 Raphael Hörmann, *Writing the Revolution: German and English Radical Literature, 1819-1848/49* (Zürich and Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2011), 351.
29 *MECW*4, 334.
30 *MECW*35, 282.
31 David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 134, 138, quoting Jack Morgan.
32 Michael McIntyre and Heidi J. Nast, "Bio(necro)polis: Marx, Surplus Populations, and the Spatial Dialectics of Reproduction and 'Race'," *Antipode* 43, no.5 (2011): 1469.
33 Paul Blackledge, "Practical Materialism: Engels's *Anti-Dühring* as Marxist Philosophy," *Critique* 45, no. 4 (2017): 494.
34 David L. Pike, *Metropolis on the Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800-2001* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2007), 161.
35 *MECW*27, 366.
36 Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1843), 227.
37 *MECW*4, 313.
38 Kehler, "Gothic Pedagogy," 440; Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester, and the Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1974), 99; and Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx* (London and New York: Verso, 2018 [2003]), 229.
39 McKenzie Wark, *Capital is Dead* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), 166.
40 Andy Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 37.
41 Leon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844; Its Present Condition and Future Prospects* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.; and Manchester: Abel Heywood, 1844), 16.
42 Blanqui quoted in Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009 [2002]), 91.

43 *MECW*4, 331, 583.
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56 *MECW*26, 451.
57 Policante, "Vampires," 5-6.
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61 *MECW*6, 495.
62 *MECW*6, 485.
63 *MECW*35, 750.
64 Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1940), 289; Francis Wheen, "The Poet of Dialectics," *The Guardian*, July 8, 2006; and William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).
65 See Carol Margaret Davison, "Gothic Architectonics: The Poetics and Politics of Gothic Space," *Papers on Language and Literature* 46, no. 2 (2010): 138-39.
66 Deborah McLeod, "Doth a Single Monk a Gothic Make? Constructing the Boundaries to Keep the Fictional Hordes at Bay," *Lumen*, no. 16 (1997): 42.
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The *Rakshasi* in the Bengali *Rupkatha* Tradition of the Late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Century

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When we look at the afterlife of the Bengali fairy tale or *rupkatha* texts published in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, we observe that one of the most popular figures from these texts that has remained in circulation within Bengali culture is that of the *rakshasi.* These *rupkatha* stories, popularly placed within the pantheon of Bengali children's literature[1] that came into existence in nineteenth-century colonial Bengal, have remained landmark texts with a rich and colourful afterlife. This paper will concentrate on the figure of the *rakshasi* as she appears within this literary tradition, particularly in the works of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar (*Thakurmar Jhuli*, 1907) and Reverend Lal Behari Day (*Folk-Tales of Bengal*, 1883).

To understand the significance of the *rakshasi* figure within the matrix of the texts, an enquiry into the historical context of the tradition is important. The socio-historical circumstance of its appearance in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was the result of an amalgamation of cultural influences and political discourses. White colonial Indologists had carried their strain of folklore scholarship from Europe to the colonies. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the consolidation of India under the British crown, knowledge about the natives was believed to be integral to the smooth running of the empire. Sadhana Naithani notes that "in this process folklore played an important role because most colonies were predominantly oral cultures. Orality became the source of all kinds of writing on the colonized."[2] A number

of folktale/fairy-tale collections thus appeared in print, collected by men who held British administrative positions in India. Along with the Christian missionaries, these men were instrumental in inspiring native *bhadroloks* into taking up the task of collecting Bengali folktales. Subsequently, with the rise of a nationalist consciousness in the late nineteenth century and the *Swadeshi* movement in the first decade of the twentieth century, folktales and other indigenous oral traditions were thrust to the forefront as a means of resistance to British hegemony and propped up as the very heart of Indian national culture. The tumultuous years that followed the first partition of Bengal in 1905 led to widespread efforts at the revival of *swadeshi*—that is, the indigenous culture of Bengal—by the bhadrolok classes who were opposed to the British move. This caused a renegotiation of the *bhadrolok* relationship with folk and popular cultural forms. Long despised as low and ill-bred and the very antithesis of educated culture throughout the nineteenth century, some of these forms were chosen for a project of revival and re-circulation among the educated upper and middle classes. This set the stage for the publication of literary texts of oral stories. Rabindranath Tagore became a leading figure in such efforts. Tagore had already been collecting folk stories for at least a decade, and the establishment of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat or the Bengali Literary Council in 1893 provided a platform that allowed him to influence others to do the same. The Bengali *rupkatha* as a literary genre thus developed from the oral storytelling tradition that existed in the region, as a result of the intersection of both these influences. This socio-historical-political context influenced the ideological standpoints of the authors as well as their writing. It also influenced the process of selection and editing of the texts. The figure of the rakshasi that appeared in these volumes was an amalgamation of folkloric beliefs with the contemporary hegemonic conceptions of womanhood that were an important part of the political and cultural discourse of the time.

Women, or rather their position within society and tradition,

had become an important issue within the political discourse of the period. This was bound to influence the representation of women in literary texts, and the *rupkatha* tradition was no exception. Orality was readily intertwined with womanhood, an association that both Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, the first writer to publish *rupkatha* in Bengali, and Reverend Lal Behari Day, the first native writer of Bengali *rupkatha* and other folk stories, made through their references to the indigenous female storyteller in the prefaces to their books. While this association was based on the social reality of women having abysmally low literacy rates at the time, it was also important to the late nineteenth-century nationalist consciousness. Women were integral to the political opposition to the colonial state by Indian nationalists. This is not to say that women were given an active space in the political opposition or allowed mass participation. Rather, women became the site on which the political opposition was staged. The condition of women had been regarded throughout the nineteenth century by the colonial state as a problem of Indian tradition. The same women were now recruited by nationalists in the defence of Indian tradition. Since cultural resistance was an important part of the political resistance, women and indigenous cultural traditions came to be conflated within contemporary political thought. Partha Chatterjee has pointed out how early Indian nationalism had separated the "domain of culture into two spheres": these spheres were linked to the differential realms of the inner and the outer, the *ghar* (home) and the *bahir* (world), the spiritual and the material, the female and the male.[3] The outer sphere of material culture involved the daily exchanges of men with the colonial state coupled with daily humiliation and compromise, whereas the inner spiritual sphere was the space where the native woman willingly submitted to the native man and remained the incorruptible bearer of traditional culture. Parallels and contrasts were drawn between the *ghar* and the *bahir* through the metaphor of household relations, as Tanika Sarkar has observed. Whereas indigenous household

relations and more specifically conjugality were presented as loving, apolitical, and based on the surrender and submission of the wife to the husband, the coloniser–colonised relationship was presented as a political relationship where one party was forced into submission to the other.[4] This also allowed the valorisation of Indian womanhood and became a justification for resisting the colonial state's interference in indigenous civil matters. The inner sphere was to be kept sacrosanct, as were the women and native traditions, as in this realm indigenous culture was superior to the West. These discourses were woven into the *rupkatha* texts' presentation of female rivalry, and female rivalry was the context within which the *rakshasi* figure usually appeared in the stories.

Female rivalry in the Bengali *rupkatha* texts occurs mainly between the self-sacrificing, good, obedient "*lakshmi*" *bou* (the wife who brings peace and prosperity to the family) and the evil, power-hungry, jealous "*alakshmi*" or "*rakshasi*" *bou* (the wife who destroys the family). The fact that they are "*shotin*" or co-wives—that is, women married to the same man—usually becomes the point of contention. The *lakshmi* bou, named after the Hindu goddess of prosperity, both displays and possesses the nature of the goddess within the bounds of the family structure. She nurtures and protects the family and is instrumental in holding it together. The *rakshasi*/*alakshmi bou* does the exact opposite; she tears the family apart. Central to the conceptualisation of such a dichotomy was the importance placed on the woman as the pivotal figure maintaining the family structures. The association of women with the home and the family in the gendered division of the sphere of work is typical of patriarchal social structures and values. The early Indian nationalist consciousness was no exception to this and had employed the association between home and women in its political resistance to the empire. The sociological workings of the polygynous family structures of the South Asian region, with men controlling all the family resources and women competing with each other for access to those resources, set women

up for the kind of conflict that manifested itself in popular tales as female rivalry and led to the prevalence of tropes such as that of the evil *shotin* (co-wife) in Bengali popular culture. Within the universe of *rupkatha* stories, the evil *shotin* or the *alakshmi* could either be a human being or a *rakshasi*, with both manifesting the same kind of destructive nature. Their villainy was not just limited to causing the destruction of their rivals and their children but also caused the total destruction of the family that they sought to control. One can provide many such examples from the *rupkatha* stories. In Mitra Majumdar's "Sheet-Basanta," the evil human queen uses a magic pill to turn her co-wife into a bird and then orders the killing of her stepsons. However, this leads to a chain of events that causes the fall of the kingdom and the death of the evil queen's own sons.[5] Similarly, in "Lal Komol Nil Komol," the *rakshasi* queen devours not only her rival's son but also her own son when the latter comes to the defence of his step-brother. The king too is ruined as other *rakshasas* come and take over the kingdom.[6]

The *alakshmi* / *rakshasi* queen is thus a threat to the stability of the family through her capability of undermining patriarchal authority from within. Her destructive nature marks her as monstrous. However, the *rakshasi* is literally a monster in the fairy-tale world. Her monstrous non-human form disqualifies her from a position within the family structures. As a result, she is always an outsider who has to gain access into the inner quarters of the family, the *andarmahal*, through deceit. In most of the stories, she becomes the king's consort by hiding her true looks and nature. For example, in Mitra Majumdar's "Dalim Kumar," the *rakshasi* tricks the young prince into giving away the dice that contains the life of his mother so that she can enter and animate the lifeless corpse and thereby become the queen.[7] Again, in "Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi," the *rakshasi* disguises herself as a beautiful woman in order to lure the king into marrying her. From her position as the queen, she is able to command the prince-protagonist to complete a task that she believes will lead

to his destruction.[8] This characterisation of the *rakshasi* as the other woman, the woman of the street, who gains entry into the home through deceit is not just a feature of the stories authored by Mitra Majumdar but can also be seen in Day's depiction of the *rakshasi*. In the story "The Boy whom Seven Mothers Suckled," the king, while out on a hunting expedition, meets a woman of peerless beauty, falls in love with her, and makes her his wife. She turns out to be a *rakshasi* who instigates the king to murder his seven pregnant wives, thereby destroying the royal family.[9] Similarly, in the story of Sahasra Dal and Champa Dal, the *rakshasi* disguises herself as a beautiful and rich woman in order to deceive the Kulin Brahmin into believing that she is his long-wedded wife. The Kulin Brahmin readily believes this deceit and is trapped as he accepts her as his second wife.[10]

This kind of imagining of the *rakshasi* within the *rupkatha* stories drew from larger cultural ideas of the *rakshasi* figure. The Rig Veda describes the *rakshasa* as a flesh-seeking, flesh-eating enemy of man. In hymn 87 dedicated to Agni of Mandala 10, Agni is called upon to destroy these creatures and is thus addressed as "*rakshas*-slayer." These creatures are presented as insatiable monsters who attack pious men and smear themselves with the flesh of cattle, horses, and human bodies. Their strength and vigour are emphasised, and Agni is invoked to destroy them.[11] The *Puranas* and the two great Indian epics provide various origin stories for the *rakshasas*. Each of these stories traces the lineage of *rakshasas* to Brahma himself and classifies them as beings belonging to the class of *upadevatas* or lesser deities. In one such story, the *rakshasa* and the *yaksha* are born when Brahma is sleeping in a hungry state, which accounts for their propensity to eat too much. In the Adi Parva of the *Mahabharata*, on the other hand, these beings are declared to have come into existence through Brahma's son Pulatsya. According to this account, the *yakshas* and *rakshasas* are sired by Vishrava, Pulatsya's son, through his two wives, Ilavida and Kaikesi. The *rakshasas* fight the *yakshas* (the Ravana and the Kubera story) as well as human beings. They

can change their appearance at will as they possess the power of *maya* (illusion). They also possess unusual strength and use that against their enemies. The same qualities are attributed to the *rakshasi,* the female form of the *rakshasa*. These figures have remained in the popular imagination as they have occupied central roles in the epics as villains (Ravana, Surpanakha and Viradha in the *Ramayana*, Jatasura in the *Mahabharata*), opponents (Kumbhakarna, Kabandha in the *Ramayana*, Kirmira and Hidimba in the *Mahabharata*), and allies (Vibhisana in the *Ramayana*, Hidimbi and Ghatotkacha in the *Mahabharata*). According to Sheldon Pollock's essay "Raksasas and Others," these figures have often been identified either with "cannibals, primitive cave dwellers, theriomorphic shamans, masked dancers in totemic rites of a sort . . . " or as "actual historical ethnic groups whose descendants yet bear cognate names, as do various sub-tribes and sub-castes . . ." Such historicising is tempting, as the location of the *rakshasas* and the *rakshasis* in the epics (as well as in *rupkatha*) in places such as forests and kingdoms situated in remote lands seems to hint at their geographical and social marginalisation. There is also reason to agree with Pollock's statement that "such historicization is not in itself unreasonable… after all people do make their fictions out of facts."[12] However, such historicising does not take into account the status of *rakshasas* as *upadevatas* or demi-gods within the Indian tradition, which meant that they had a place within the Vedic and Puranic pantheon. Such attempts at historicisation can also only be speculative at best and is based on the work of white colonial Indologists who often wrote their histories with improper understanding of (and without visiting) the subcontinent. It is important, when commenting on a particular figure derived from a cultural tradition, to study the significance of the figure within that tradition without resorting to generalisations. As Pollock himself points out, what these figures represent within particular texts is ideational.[13] The texts ascribe significance to the characters they present within their universe. For example, in the

Ramayana, the *rakshasas* Kabandha and Viradha, who live isolated in forests (unlike the *rakshasas* of Lanka who live in a prosperous and organised society) are trapped in their terrifying forms because of Karma and its workings in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The struggle between Ravana (presented as a devotee of Shiva) and Rama (who upholds his Kshatriya dharma) is also presented as the result of past deeds and the workings of Karma. However, the viewpoint perpetuated by white colonial Indologists was well established by the time Lal Behari Day was writing, and he annotates the *rakshasis* as "the chiefs of the aborigines whom the Aryans overthrew on their first settlement in the country."[14]

In contrast to the *rakshasas* in the epics, the *rakshasi* in Bengali *rupkatha* is presented as a different kind of being, and her being born in the bloodthirsty form has nothing to do with the laws of Karma. There are simply no *rakshasis* who are not evil in the universe of *rupkatha*. The depiction of *rakshasas* and *rakshasis* in the epics is far more complicated. There is a difference between the *rakshasas* who live in Lanka in a civilised society and are worried about moral complexities, and the solitary *rakshasas* like Kabandha and Viradha who live in forests and attack humans. There are *rakshasa* characters who possess and display the capacity for compassion (like the *rakshasis* Sarama and Trijata, who befriend and protect Sita in Lanka) as well as characters like Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna who have moral qualms about the right course of action and the workings of justice. The *rakshasi* in Bengali *rupkatha* is, however, depicted as driven exclusively by lust and blind hatred. Whenever she appears in a story, the narrative requires her death in order to reach closure. She is presented as inhabiting forests as well as the *rakshasa* kingdom. When she is introduced as a solitary figure, the story also goes on to tell the reader about the kingdoms that belong exclusively to her kind. The heroes in tales like "Lal Komol Nil Komol" and "Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi" travel to these kingdoms. One of the most interesting features that sets the *rupkatha* tales apart from the epics is that the

former do not have any male *rakshasas* in central roles. Even when the plot lines shift to the kingdoms of the *rakshasas* and the *rakshasis*, the central figure is a matriarch, usually the mother of the original villainous *rakshasi*. This is consistent with the presentation of women in villainous roles in these stories.

The way the epics and the Puranas influenced folkloric belief is commented upon by A. K. Ramanujan in his prose essay "Telling Tales." He writes: "even Sanskrit mythologies have to be studied not only from texts, as they have been, but on the ground—as they are selectively remembered and told in context. For they are not only in written texts; they also have a parallel life in the oral traditions . . . We need to work at Indian mythologies as if they were folklore in order to get a nuanced and true sense of what they are about. By doing so, we could also hear the dialogue between the Puranic mythologies and the non-literate creations like those carried and polished and renewed by nameless and subtly powerful grandmothers."[15] In the folkloric world where oral *rupkatha* stories circulated, the *rakshasi* was remembered as purely evil and was a supernatural being with the power to change physical form at will. She could use her eyes to suck blood out of her victims and was driven by hate and desire for flesh. Like the mythological *rakshasi*, she was terrifying to look at in her original physical form. She became a part of the rich world of supernatural beings, ghosts, demons, and spirits that inhabited the cultural space of rural Bengal. *Thakurmar Jhuli* thus opens the section called "*Rup Tarasi*" (literally meaning 'of terrifying visage'), which contains all the *rakshasi* stories, with the rhyme: "those whose looks frighten, but who remain disguised as human beings." (translated from the original Bengali)[16]

Although the *rakshasi* figure is often associated with lustfulness and sexual excess in the epics, she is not always punished for it. Surpanakha and Hidimbi both proposition the male heroes, Ram and Bhim respectively. While Surpanakha is punished for refusing to acknowledge the ties of marriage, Bhim and Hidimbi marry

and have a son Ghatotkacha, who is dedicated to his father. In the literary *rupkatha* text, this traditional feature of the *rakshasi* interplays with the suggestion of sexual immorality that was ingrained within the idea of the woman who existed outside family structures, the woman of the street. However, the *rakshasi* figure in the stories of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar and Lal Behari Day may also be distinguished on the basis of the authors' treatment of the theme of sexuality. Sexuality remains subterranean in Mitra Majumdar but comes to the surface in Lal Behari Day's presentation. A close reading of the stories mentioned above (both Day's and Mitra Majumdar's, where a *rakshasi* enters a human household from outside) always reveals an implied desire on the part of the *rakshasi* for initiation into a sexual/conjugal relation with a man. This desire is not merely economic, in that it is not just a desire for the position of queen consort and all the wealth and security it brings; it is also sexual. The *rakshasi* desires flesh, both literal in that she wants to consume people and animals, and metaphorical in that she wants sexual relationships with the male characters. In Day's "Story of the Rakshasas," the *rakshasi* could not have had any economic motivation for marrying a poor Brahmin. She desires to be his wife, and then she desires his flesh. She devours him and his human wife when they discover her true self. In the same story, Day also presents a *rakshasi* making false accusations of sexual assault against the protagonist—the son of the first *rakshasi* and the Brahmin, Champa Dal. He encounters this *rakshasi*—who is disguised as a maidservant—in the palace of Sahasra Dal, Champa's human half-brother. This woman is clever, resourceful, tremendously useful, and indispensable to the mother-in-law of Sahasra Dal. She is placed outside the dichotomy of female rivalry but is nevertheless a villainous figure who deceitfully attempts to get rid of Champa Dal by maligning him in retaliation for his act of obstructing her nightly hunts for live meat. Day, writing two decades before Mitra Majumdar, did not edit out all references to sexuality like

the latter, who was writing in the heyday of the *swadeshi* cultural revivalist movement with a juvenile readership in mind. (The *rupkatha* was conceptualised as a tradition belonging to the national child and carried forward by the national woman.[17]) Such censoring was also important to the *swadeshi* cultural project because of its romantic infantilisation of women and children. It was for this reason that Mitra Majumdar's *rupkatha* collections received effusive praise from nationalist scholars such as Dinesh Chandra Sen. Sen believed that the absence of references to sexuality, particularly representations of female sexual desire, in Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's volumes proved the authenticity of his version of the stories. Since these stories were composed and told by women, Sen argued, they must be "pure" and devoid of "vulgar(ities)"[18] such as women propositioning men, attempting incest, and engaging in extramarital sexual relations. Sen compared Mitra Majumdar's stories with the earlier versions told through court romances by Muslim writers as well as by Lal Behari Day and proclaimed that Mitra Majumdar had recorded the exact versions of the stories as told by Hindu women in their homes. However, Sen might very well have been praising Mitra Majumdar's censoring of the stories as the mark of their authenticity. There is a section in *Thakurmar Jhuli* that may be identified as an instance of Mitra Majumdar's censorship of references to sexual desire. In the story "Sonar Kathi Rupar Kathi," the grudge of the *rakshasi* against the young prince remains somewhat unexplained. She seems to want the prince's destruction because she is unable to devour him like she devours his three friends when she chances upon them in the forest. The *rakshasi* follows him till the end of the forest and then entices the ruler of the kingdom where the prince had taken shelter to marry her, so that she can have the prince in her power. One has to read between the lines here because what the prince had actually done to anger the *rakshasi* is never explained in the story.

Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's treatment of female rivalry and

the *rakshasi* figure can be linked to a specific conception of Indian womanhood within the nationalist discourses. The central conflicts had the self-sacrificing good woman on the moral side and the desiring self-serving evil woman on the other side. This conception of the Indian woman required her willing surrender to the harsh demands of indigenous patriarchy. Such an idea was central to the nationalist distinction between the nature of Indian tradition and that of British colonialism. The Indian woman, 'the other' within the self (the nation), became the central site for developing and emphasising this distinction. During the public debates surrounding the raising of the age of consent, nationalists were forced to admit that the Indian woman was subject to social laws and cultural dictums that were detrimental to her. However, as Tanika Sarkar has observed, the revivalist-nationalists who were opposed to indigenous social reformers as well as British interference argued that the Indian woman followed socio-religious laws voluntarily, no matter how ruthless these laws were. The Indian woman was held up as the embodiment of Indian tradition as well as the marker of its superiority because of her ability to sacrifice her interests, her body, and even her life for the well-being of her people. This discourse also emphasised the essential difference between the East and the West with regard to the social space occupied by women. The wife in the West was the companion of man, whereas in the East she was a goddess (specifically in Indian tradition). The spiritual superiority of the East was established by the Eastern woman's moral triumph as represented in her self-sacrificing ability. Such linkages ultimately led to the birth of the figure of Mother India as a Hindu ascetic, painted by Abanindranath Tagore in 1922. She was depicted as a four-armed goddess in saffron robes, embodying the quality of self-renunciation or *tyag*. Woman, tradition, and religion were therefore linked to form a co-ordinated concept of nationhood. This general perception of Indian womanhood led to the valorisation of the goddess as a self-sacrificing heroic woman in the literature produced

during this time. *Tyag* was at the very foundation of femininity and female love. In *rupkatha* texts, the antithesis of the qualities that constituted this rigid ideal of the Indian woman was embodied in the figure of the evil woman. All the *rakshasis* who appear in the section *"Rup Tarasi"* of *Thakurmar Jhuli* are desiring rather than sacrificing. They have voracious appetites, which mark them as unnatural and monstrous. This is further reinforced through the folkloric/mythic ideas of her frightening form, excessive physical capabilities, and supernatural powers. The *rakshasi* therefore becomes a source of primal terror, made more dangerous by the fact that she can hide her true nature. These capabilities allow her to usurp power at certain points in the *rupkatha* stories. I say usurp because power is overtly a male forte in the *rupkatha* universe, and the stories can end only with the re-establishment of the patriarch. This model of female behaviour is contrasted in the texts of Mitra Majumdar and Day with that of the good woman who never attempts to displace or subvert male authority, no matter how unjust it is. The *rakshasi* and other villainous women inevitably pay the ultimate price for their actions and find no redemption. Significantly, their sons can be redeemed, even though they bear the *rakshasis*' blood.

That the *rakshasi*'s existence largely revolved around taking what she desired both through trickery and through force, with little regard for the laws of organised society, was a feature that could be seen in older traditions of Indian literature as well. In addition, the villainisation of the ambitious, assertive woman who originated from the street but gained access to the *andarmahal* and became the enemy within could also be traced to the nineteenth century *bhadroloks*' fear of any kind of female behaviour that deviated from the prescribed model of submissive domesticity. Sumanta Banerjee has discussed this in his essay "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal," where he states that it was the fear of rebellion alongside the newer cultural values derived from the colonial encounter that had prompted the *bhadrolok* classes to

launch a campaign against women's popular cultural forms that presented assertive women as heroines and gave space to voices expressing dissent. Banerjee writes, "The coarse, 'untutored' expletives and expressions that they shared with the women of the streets, had to be expurgated from their vocabulary. Any sign of assertiveness or of departure from their domestic roles that might be inspired by stories about the adulterous Radha, or the assertive Vidya, had to be suppressed."[19] There were essays published in periodicals like the *Bamabodhini Patrika* that warned of the dangers of women in *bhadrolok andarmahals* reading *Vidya-Sundar* in secret. Thus, it is not surprising that the assertive woman as the villain was a regular pattern that emerged from the collections authored by male *bhadrolok* writers. Fear of the flesh-eating monster and fear of the untamed, undomesticated woman came together in the depiction of the *rakshasi* in *rupkatha*, a being in equal parts mythical, folkloric, and historic, who in the stories became a threat to the stability and continued existence of the patriarchal and patrilinear society.

NOTES

1 The term *"shishu sahitya"* was first coined by Ramendra Sundar Tibedi in his introduction to Jogindranath Sarkar's *Khukhumonir Chora* in 1899.
2 Sadhana Naithani, *The Story-Time of the British Empire: Colonial and Postcolonial Folkloristics* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 5.
3 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 120.
4 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 39.
5 Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, *Thakurmar Jhuli* (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 1907), 85-110.
6 Mitra Majumdar, *Thakurmar Jhuli*, 141-163.
7 Mitra Majumdar, 164-177.
8 Mitra Majumdar, 191-210.
9 Reverend Lal Behari Day, *Folk-Tales of Bengal* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 113-118.

10 Day, *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, 61-88.
11 *The Hymns of Rig Veda*, trans. Ralph T. Griffith (Nilgiri: n.p., 1986), 466. http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/index.htm.
12 Sheldon Pollock, "Raksasas and Others," *Indologica Taurinensia* 13, no. 1 (1985): 265.
13 Pollock, "Raksasas and Others," 266.
14 Day, *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, 64.
15 A. K. Ramanujan, "Telling Tales," in *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 456.
16 Mitra Majumdar, *Thakurmar Jhuli*, 140.
17 Tagore, who wrote a prose Preface to *Thakurmar Jhuli,* presented this concept. He called the stories "*snehomoyee der mukher kotha*" or the oral stories of the loving women, and "*deshlakshmi der buker kotha*" or the narratives of the heart of the blessed women of the land. The stories could also provide nourishment to the national child, like mother's milk.
18 Dinesh Chandra Sen, *The Folk Literature of Bengal* (Kolkata: Aparna Book Distributers, 2007), 132.
19 Sumanta Banerjee, "Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal," in *Recasting Women*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 163.

City of Spectres: Spectral Spatialities of Calcutta and their Depiction in Bengali Ghost Stories

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INTRODUCTION

As shadows hound light, the city of lights is inextricable from a parallel city of darkness. Anthony Vidler confirms this when he writes that the first 'considered politics of spaces' shaped by 'scientific concepts of light and infinity' also witnessed the inception of 'a spatial phenomenology of darkness' within the same epistemology.[1] The same principle may be applied to Calcutta. Hemendra Kumar Roy's *Raater Kolkata* (1923) claims to be an authentic account of scenes the author had witnessed during his nocturnal flânerie through the city. It begins with a panegyric about Calcutta's grandeur, 'Second city of the British empire, India's most important urban centre, Paris of the East, melting pot of all races, pride of Bengalis, cradle of the renaissance, city of palaces!'[2] However, beginnings can be deceptive. The rest of the account hinges on the sins of the city instead of its wonders, the shadows and inequities that hide behind the lights and the splendour of this 'cradle of the renaissance.' Thus, we see that in descriptions of Calcutta, 'light spaces' go hand in hand with 'dark spaces.'

This idea of duality can be related to trends in urban historiography. Anuparna Mukherjee calls Calcutta a 'spectropolis,' a 'ghost city' persisting in the interstices of the modern. Being both real and imaginary, living and dead, it underpins the urban 'everyday' in postcolonial Calcutta. The spectral renders the postcolonial city into a site of temporal tensions causing dissonances which localize at haunted spaces.[3] In this, while one strand of the city's preserved,

collective past belongs to the register of national heritage, there is another imaginary past, an alternative history enshrined by the haunted spaces of the city. Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard compare this to a 'gothic novel scenario' within which '. . . a stranger is already there, in residence.'[4] A subterranean history resides within an official one, its uncanniness only enhanced by the fact that it is always already there. As such, it is an 'oddity' characterized by opacity and ambivalence. However, these presences also make cities 'livable.' Thus the darkness of the city nurtures light and the dead end up enlivening the city. This paradox hints at an ethical dimension of this duality which requires further scrutiny.

Now, how is this duality, this co-existence of light and darkness, expressed in discourses about the city? In his introduction to the English translation of *Raater Kolkata*, Rajat Chaudhuri writes of the Gothic resonances of the text, the Dickensian darkness under the gaslights, 'gothic interludes' in the form of certain scenes that remind him of Edgar Allan Poe.[5] Taking a cue from this, it can be argued that a well-established tradition of portraying Calcutta as a Gothic city has been instrumental in encapsulating the duality and fundamental ambivalence informing its space and history. This Gothic strain underpinning urban space is probably captured most comprehensively in Bengali ghost stories featuring the city. The present paper attempts to map the Gothic geography of the city through a spatial analysis of a number of such texts and as such, paint a portrait of the uncanny 'stranger' residing at the heart of the city.

THE CITY AS A PHANTASMAGORIC DIORAMA

The Gothic is anticipated by the phantasmagoric. The phantasmagoric qualities of the city have already been highlighted by writers since the early years of British colonial rule. Early nineteenth century visitors to the city such as Mrs. Fenton had '. . . glimpses of the Arabian tales and biblical stories in India.'[6] The construction of Calcutta as

a phantasmagoric city was not limited to the exoticising vision of early European visitors. This is illustrated in stories like Premendra Mitra's 'Kalkatay Arabya Rajani' or 'The Arabian Nights of Calcutta.' Within this framed narrative, Nilambar, the protagonist, meets a mysterious storyteller who recounts a 'Baghdadi' fable about a thief echoing the 'Persian tales' of Mrs. Fenton.[7]

The inherently phantasmagoric nature of Calcutta is revealed by the fact that the storyteller and Nilambar both find themselves in a dislocated Arabian night transforming the postcolonial city entrenched in trade and commerce. Here, the everyday is marked by banal hardships and financial troubles. The protagonist misses a train and does not have enough money to hail a taxi. However, just after half past eleven at night, in front of the Isfahani Church, Calcutta, in all its wretched realism, metamorphoses into an Arabian tale. This is aligned to Steve Pile's idea of the 'phantasmagoria' inherent in city life entailing a 'peculiar' amalgamation of spaces and times. The phantasmagoria or 'the ghost-like or dream-like procession of things' that one witnesses in cities comes from all over the place, even non-existent ones (the magical Baghdad in Mitra's story, for instance). It also combines very different times, real and imagined.[8] The mysterious storyteller in 'Kalkatay Arabya Rajani' concurs as he says, 'My wife's brothers read Arabic and Persian *khwabs* and *kheyals*, a lot of drama and novels. But no one knows that those Baghdads from the stories do not even hold a candle to Calcutta.'[9]

The atmospheric description of the urban fabric that follows paints Calcutta in an unfamiliar, eerie light. Consider this description of a neighbourhood:

> . . . where the tiny dead-end lane branching out of the arterial road to the west stops dead, the *paan*-shop at the corner will shut down for the day and as the light goes out, you will notice the spine-chilling sense of unease that will begin to surround you. The giant houses will close in on you like

> monster mansions. There are lights along the streets, but they will appear to have mysterious gazes portending something evil.[10]

Mitra's description of the city at this time is an expert attempt at defamiliarisation. The urban imaginary, for Certeau and Giard, is exemplified through 'inanimate' objects: buildings and spaces.[11] In the story, a tiny triangular park is identified as the 'centre' of the 'whirlwind' constituting the city.[12] Thus, even a nondescript park is infused with signification in a terrain steeped in magic, revealing the phantasmagoric urban imaginary informing Calcutta.

We find a similar note of phantasmagoria in Mitra's story. Here, the thief, Becharam, is compared to a wild animal in a forest of buildings as he navigates the cluttered urban space with finesse. He writes, 'He used to climb up the pipes like a squirrel and whenever he spotted a problem, he would jump from roof to roof and vanish like a *khatash* (civet).'[13] Such animal-people figured in Roy's account of Calcutta as well. He writes,

> Just as in those times there were people who were like tigers, this day too there is no dearth of tigers in human garb in Calcutta. Rather the legions of these tiger-people have grown. . . These tigers and tigresses are scattered all across the city—through the day they move about in groups amongst us. Always alert and waiting for prey, like an invisible pestilence.[14]

This is obviously a metaphorical explication of the moral corruption of the metropolis but it adds, nonetheless, to the uncanny atmosphere of the city. The disturbing animal-people fill the city and are adept at navigating urban space just like wild animals navigate jungles. This adds to the city's identification with an evil entity as Roy adds that 'easy-going' parents sending their children to the city from the countryside do not know that the latter would be swallowed up

by these phantasmagoric 'tigers and tigresses' and return home as 'ghosts'.[15]

The city, thus, is a monstrosity that claims the soul of the unsuspecting outsider. This could be related to the idea of the evils inherent in space which attempts to harm the people in it. Anthony Vidler borrows from theorists such as Roger Caillois and Eugène Minkowski to arrive at an idea of spatial psychasthenia involving 'dark space.' This, as opposed to light space, attempts to consume a person. In fact, dark space is envisioned by these theorists as a 'living entity.'[16] This notion could be extended to cover the dark city of Calcutta, especially at night. The city, constituted as it is by dark, phantasmagoric spaces, becomes a living entity in the literary imagination of these writers. It engulfs, and figuratively consumes the unsuspecting outsider, and sometimes, even the canny insider, leaving behind only ghosts. Thus, we see the phantasmagoric surreptitiously cross over into the Gothic.

THE *FLÂNEUR* IN THE LABYRINTH

In his book, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction,* Robert Mighall writes of the development of the literary genre of the urban Gothic in the nineteenth century. Based primarily in London and Paris, the fiction falling under this genre relocates the domain of the Gothic to the city in the nineteenth century. Urban Gothic is distinct from rural Gothic in that '. . . it is a Gothic *of* the city. Its terrors derive from situations peculiar to, and firmly located within, the urban experience.'[17] For instance, in Premendra Mitra's story, 'Kalikatar Galite' or 'In the Lanes of Calcutta,' the narrator differentiates between the rural Gothic of Bengal and the specificities of the Gothic city. He writes of the protagonist, Vishwanath, 'He can walk for miles through a pitch-black bamboo grove in the dead of the night. He has collected timber from funeral pyres at the edge of the village on new moon nights for so many mock challenges. Calcutta is the only

thing he is scared of.'[18] Calcutta, too, is thus marked by its specific brand of Gothic.

While charting the anatomy of the urban Gothic, Mighall says that the city, or at least certain parts thereof, is likened to a labyrinth. He writes, 'It [a labyrinth] carries a range of associations, suggesting secrets and anxieties and even hinting at half-human monsters prowling its precincts.' Even as the opaque, anxiety-inducing urban districts associated with crime and disorder came to be 'mapped and explored' in the nineteenth century, they continued to be associated with the labyrinth in the popular imagination of the time.[19] This geographical poeticization was based, to some extent, on the difference between the modernized quarters of the city and the older, less organized ones. In the case of Paris and London, the latter, in comparison to the former, become mythical and confusing. A similar divide might be located in the case of Calcutta which can trace its origin back to the division of the city into the black and white towns from colonial times. Although such distinctions were problematised as the quarters had uncertain boundaries and often spilled into one another even in the heyday of colonial rule, the labyrinthine *golis* or lanes of North Calcutta (the erstwhile black town) have continued to be a powerful image underpinning the spatial imaginary of the urban Gothic. This sense of a divide, as it were, is reinforced in Mitra's story. When Vishwanath's friends ridicule him for his fear of the city, he says, 'I'm not talking about Chowringhee or Central Avenue. All of Calcutta isn't Chowringhee.'[20]

The horrors of the monstrous labyrinth(s) constituting the city are confirmed by characters getting lost in its complex of lanes and by-lanes. The same thing happens to Vishwanath. As he tries to find his long-lost friend Abinash in the labyrinthine city, he enters one lane after another. There are a few streetlights flickering here and there, creating an eerie atmosphere. Moreover, lined with very old, skeletal houses, the lane refuses to end.[21] The protagonist, quite unsuspectingly, seems to have entered an urban labyrinth with

structures (the streetlights and the houses) which repeat themselves across an endless street. Then, finally, Vishwanath realizes that the only way to escape the lane is via the opening from which he had entered it in the first place.[22] He is now truly trapped in a labyrinth where space folds in on itself creating an effect of uncanny circularity. This terrifies him. For Walter Benjamin, the city is a deceptive place where the blameless topography belies hidden entrances to the underworld, from the 'consciousness' of the city to a threatening subterranean space.[23] This was one of those instances where the protagonist simply slipped out of the city's consciousness to a spatial nightmare in the infamous *golis* of Calcutta. These, assuming the characteristics of Vidler's 'dark space,' threaten to consume him. However, right when he is on the verge of giving up hope of ever escaping, he finds the Minotaur. His friend Abinash appears to him, standing under a flickering streetlight. He is a ghost.[24]

Hemendra Kumar Roy's narrator in *Raater Kolkata* is what Walter Benjamin would call a flâneur. A flâneur is an urban wanderer. He roams around in the streets of a big city while being detached from it. In *The Arcades Project,* Benjamin describes the flâneur as a person who is dictated by a certain 'intoxication' which compels him to walk 'long and aimlessly through the streets.' He[25] is not tempted by the shops and the spectacles of the metropolis, he only goes forward propelled by the 'magnetism of the next street corner.'[26] In a similar vein, Roy writes about venturing out into the city at night, 'Braving great dangers, time and again avoiding the knives of hoodlums, in the spirit of adventure, I alone, like a creature of darkness, just a short and stout stick on my person, have regularly roamed the streets of Calcutta from evening till the end of night.'[27] Roy's narrator is granted a position of privilege by virtue of his position as a flâneur and observer.

On the theme of the gaze, we must address Jacques Derrida's idea of the spectral. For Derrida, the spectre is someone who watches us.

This forges a completely 'dyssimetrical' relationship of non-reciprocity invoking the inherent heteronomy of our relationship with the law. It addresses itself to only the one who is subject to this gaze without any possibility for an exchange.[28] The best example of the spectral gaze can be found in Rabindranath Tagore's 1907 story, 'Mastermashay.' At the beginning, Venugopal, a drunk lawyer, is whisked across the city in the very carriage in which his old home-tutor had died, and in it, he encounters a gaze, 'No eyes, nothing at all, but a gaze.'[29] The absence of the eye brings to the forefront the dissymmetry and the heteronomy of the spectral gaze in this case. It is as if the ghostly gaze were commanding him to enquire about its identity and its origin. This is its 'infinite demand,' to be recognized and the betrayal that was done to him to be acknowledged.

Coming back to Benjamin, the act of flânerie is shaped by a dialectic. He writes, '. . . on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man.'[30] The flâneurs in these texts often find themselves shifting around this dialectic. From the all-powerful observer, they are unnerved when they find themselves on the other end of the gaze. If we can integrate this with Derrida's idea of the spectral gaze, the flâneur is always in a dialectic with spectrality, as a result of which he is regarded unreciprocally by an 'other.' This precarious and slippery position of the flâneur is illustrated in Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's 1930 story, 'Andhakare.' Here, the narrator has to return to his home in Badurbagan from Howrah on a rainy night. In the process, he has to traverse the city during a power failure. In the resultant darkness a phantom voice guides him through the waterlogged city and a ghostly hand holds his to steady him.[31] Here too, the city presents its labyrinthine side to the narrator. He loses his way immediately after setting out from the teashop where he had taken shelter. He tries to make sense of the urban topography on which he is walking, trying to tell pavement from road through tactile information.[32]

This is an example of the sensory engulfment to which victims are subjected once they enter the urban labyrinth. Another instance of this can be found in 'Kalikata'r Galite.' Here, the labyrinth is characterised by a dank smell and an unnerving silence that is uncharacteristic of Calcutta. At one point, the smell begins to suffocate him as his vision is obstructed by a heavy fog.[33] The sensory atmosphere of the urban labyrinth is paradoxically characterized by an excess (of smells, touch) on the one hand, and a lack (of light) on the other. This distorts the flâneur's experience of the city and facilitates the reversal of power with regard to the dialectic of flânerie mentioned above. This can be related to the distinction that Alexandra Warwick draws between the flâneur, who is 'the man in easy mastery of his surroundings' and his 'negative double' who is a 'person in paranoid relation to his environment.' She describes the latter as 'the logical extension of the flâneur' illustrating the shift from 'glorious individualism to isolation and alienation' again fulfilling Benjamin's dialectic of flânerie. While the flâneur takes pleasure in his urban surroundings, the 'paranoid wandering subject' experiences a sense of terror. Warwick writes, '… instead of consuming he is consumed, in a neatly twisted version of cannibalism. It is the unheimlich manoeuvre … in which the position of the subject collapses from the illusion of coherent dominance into fragmentary dissolution.'[34] In my analysis, the flâneur, upon entering urban labyrinths, transforms into a 'paranoid wandering subject' whose relation to his surroundings is marked by unease and disorientation.

Extending this thesis, he also becomes subject to the heteronomy of the spectral injunction in some cases. Continuing my analysis of Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's 'Andhakare,' we see that a voice and a hand appear in the darkness to guide the narrator. Again, there is a sensory imbalance here as visual information is completely cut off but tactile and aural information overflows. The hand, for instance, is ice cold.[35] The voice assumes all the power in their dealings. It teases the narrator, scaring him by invoking ghosts and spirits and displaying

an uncanny knowledge about the narrator's life. As the latter slides across the scale to become the paranoid wandering subject, the ghost assumes the role of a powerful flâneur who can navigate the streets even when the city is submerged in darkness. When the narrator asks him what he does for a living, he answers, 'Nothing, I just wander from place to place, aimlessly.'[36] This completes the identification of the ghost to a flâneur.

In a singularly uncanny moment, the voice reveals that the narrator had wandered to the Nimtala burning *ghat* in the darkness, which possibly explains the origin of the ghostly voice. He then sketches a tentative route for him, avoiding spots such as the *Thanthane* Kali temple.[37] This generates occult spatialities, connecting disparate spots within the dark city which are as much a cause as they are an effect of its Gothic underpinnings.

SPECTRAL MAPS AND OCCULT SPATIALITIES

Steve Pile uses the term 'occult spatialities' to refer to a '. . . dream-like, phantasmatic sense of the production of space.' For him, 'These occult spatialities take on many forms and have a variety of consequences.'[38] For instance, in Himadrikishore Dasgupta's short story, 'Chhobita Apni Bhaloi Aanken,' or, 'You Sketch Pretty Well,' the police sketch artist, Nikhilesh is followed home from the police station by the ghost of a murdered man, Mukunda. He does not reveal his identity initially but gives Nikhilesh directions to sketch the real murderer, ultimately helping the police solve the case.[39] Here, the spatial story written by Mukunda's ghost following Nikhilesh persistently through the lanes and by-lanes of Calcutta inscribes his ghostly quest for justice onto the fabric of the city. As such, it is a manifestation of occult spatiality. Repetition cements this spatiality as Mukunda reappears in the same lane to compliment Nikhilesh's artistic skills and thank him for avenging him at the end of the story.[40] Calcutta becomes a matrix of such occult spatialities

as ghostly trajectories crisscross through its urban fabric endowing it with additional layers of signification.

Texts like this corroborate the ambulatory nature of spectrality in the city. The presences move around constantly, tracing spectral trajectories across the city, and imbuing it with an extra layer of signification. In this, they could be aligned with Susan Bernstein's notion of the 'ambulatory uncanny,' the uncanny that 'walks.' When we encounter the uncanny in a state of motion, we enter into a 'circulation of signifiers' which sets into motion a series of repetitions.[41] We find an example of this in Rajshekhar Basu's short story, 'Mahesher Mahajatra' or 'Mahesh's Ultimate Journey' (1931). Here, college teachers Harinath Kundu and Mahesh Mitra are at loggerheads over the question of the existence of ghosts. After the non-believer Mahesh dies, it falls on Harinath to carry his body to the burning ground. He has to traverse the empty streets of the Gothic city on a foggy night. Eerily, Mahesh's corpse grows heavier as Harinath and his companions advance. In a phantasmagoric, almost dream-like turn of events, their party is joined by identical strangers in black shawls who ultimately replace the entire party except Harinath. It is perhaps the sense of repetition signaled by the identical appearance of these apparitions that hints at the advent of the ambulatory uncanny in this scenario. They fly through the streets, etching an endless path that connects Beadon Street, Cornwallis Street and Goldighi into one occult circuit. This is a circulation of spectral signifiers, or a phantasmic production of space of which Harinath is now a part as he has encountered the ambulatory uncanny in the form of the black-shawled corpse-carriers. Harinath struggles to keep up. However, he is also compelled to follow the uncanny party until the dead Mahesh fulfills his ghostly quest by announcing that he has been proven wrong; there is, indeed, an afterlife.[42]

The ambulatory uncanny can also be related to haunted means of transport. One striking feature of Tagore's story, 'Mastermashay' is the way the Brougham is deployed by the ghostly entities. It

is doomed to repeat the same route through Maidan under the influence of Haralal's ghost. This repetition, again, affiliates it to the ambulatory uncanny. Another instance can be found in Sajanikanta Das's story, 'Rikshawallah' or 'The Rikshaw-puller.' Here, the eponymous *rikshaw*-puller, Maqbool and his *rikshaw*, are both haunted by a phantom corpse of a person who was murdered there. Maqbool can only take on one passenger at a time because the corpse continues to occupy the other seat. The narrator of the story happens to be one of those unlucky passengers who ride in the company of the invisible corpse which only Maqbool can see.[43] John Allen writes of the 'horrors' of public transport in a big city, 'People who use public transport . . . rarely have any choice about whom they share their travelling space with, and there are limits to the protection from other people's behaviour that can be afforded to passengers.'[44] In a Gothic city, one does not choose the ghosts one travels with.

Thus, in these stories, urban space becomes charged with signification as ghosts inscribe on it their quest for recognition and in some cases, justice, tracing and retracing spectral paths on the urban fabric. Public transport plays an important role in this regard. Binoy Ghosh, in his sketches on Calcutta's public transport, offers the reader a detailed entry on *rikshaws*. The humorous tone of the entry belies the underlying horrors of public transport and commute. He writes of the undaunted 'rikshaw-dada' and his exploits,

> He has gone on several perilous adventures even during the [communal] riots, those are beyond compare. Putting the screen of the rikshaw down, he had ridden through Muslim areas with a Muslim rikshaw-puller and through Hindu areas with his Hindu counterpart, and traversed the length of Calcutta in the process. There was not a single problem.[45]

Talking presumably about the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946 where

more than four thousand people lost their lives, Ghosh quite cleverly demonstrates how these great episodes of violence in the history of the city get entangled into concrete objects, such as the *rikshaw,* and are remembered metonymically in association to them. This is similar to the way the murdered man's blood lingers in Maqbool's *rikshaw,* or Haralal's gaze pierces the darkness inside the haunted brougham. In the stories, the vehicles and their spectral appendages offer testimonies to great cruelties in the private sphere. However, the dark city and its landscape of violence are always implicated in these personal histories of betrayal and the spectral quest for justice they set into motion. As such, Anuparna Mukherjee imputes a 'retributive' function to urban ghost stories. In her example, this enables them to reverse the power structure as colonial figures like Warren Hastings are doomed to return to the site of their crimes and seek, in vain, to exculpate themselves.[46] The relationship between spectrality, justice and urban historiography can be elucidated using Derrida's idea of the spectrality.

GHOSTLY INJUNCTIONS AND THE ETHICS OF SPECTRALITY

In his description of the spectral gaze, Derrida adds that from the moment the object of the gaze is barred from returning it (as is always the case with the spectral gaze), one begins to deal with the 'other.' And temporally, this other always precedes the object of the gaze. As such, there is a debt initiated by the absence of reciprocity. There is no chance of an exchange because the other is also absent.[47] The spectres of the city and their quest for justice can be seen as a figuration of this 'other.' They are also Certeau's stranger in the city, and we are, in a way, in debt to them. This gives rise to the question, what restitution are these ghosts demanding and how are their demands to be met if the gaze cannot be returned?

At the South Park Street cemetery, the historian of the city, Nikhil Sarkar, encounters a ghost. It is a tall man in ragged clothes who

claims to belong to a Muslim family that came here with the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj ud-Daulah during the siege of Calcutta in 1756. He was evicted from his house when Warren Hastings built his imperial residence on its site. Visibly shaken by this encounter, Sarkar nonetheless does some research at the library. He unearths an issue of *The Statesman* from 1915 which recounts an excavation around Hastings House yielding two wells which might have been in use by the residents of a slum that was demolished to make room for the palace.[48]

As such, this ghost is perhaps the best exemplar of Calcutta's spectral other whose gaze we are unable to return. Alex Link talks about '. . . the general condition of an accretive urban historicity available to local knowledges and local resistances.'[49] The ghost embodies this accretive historicity insofar as the layers of his history are woven into the physical layers of the city in the form of graveyards and libraries and excavated wells. And, quite tellingly, he reveals himself to the historian as a ghost. He demands that Sarkar write about him, redeeming him from a state of oblivion and destitution, and simultaneously fulfilling his duty as a writer.[50] Indeed, for Derrida, our inability to settle our 'debt' to ghosts creates 'a condition of freedom' originating from a condition of 'responsibility.' The sense of debt that the historian feels towards the ghost gives rise to responsibility, and then, the freedom to act, or in his case, write and redeem the ghost.

In fact, for Derrida, the ghost is the point of origin for all demands of justice.[51] Our capacity for meaningful political action springs from the ethics of a 'spectral oath' we make to the other, who is also our past(s). Sarkar's ghost story thus performs the restitution of this debt to the city's 'other' in the form of remembrance.[52] Later, walking by the cemetery one day, he notices the ghost, now much attenuated, grinding spices on a commemorative marble plaque outside the graveyard.[53] The scene is pregnant with meaning, be it a postcolonial appropriation of imperial history, or an act of local resistance along

the lines of class. This entire body of resonances owes its existence to the ghostly nature of Sarkar's encounter. It can thus be argued that urban spectrality opens up a repository of subdued meanings in the everyday life on the one hand, and facilitates ethical action by initiating a 'spectral oath' on the other.

NOTES

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3 Anuparna Mukherjee, 'After the Empire: Narratives of Haunting in the Postcolonial Spectropolis,' *South Asian Review* 40, no. 4 (2019): 3-4, https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2019.1604061.
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8 Steve Pile, *Real Cities: Modernity, Space and the Phantasmagorias of City Life* (London: Sage, 2005), 3.
9 Mitra, 'Kolkata'r Arabya Rajani,' 175.
10 Mitra, 'Kolkata'r Arabya Rajani,' 171.
11 Certeau, 'Ghosts in the City,' 135.
12 Mitra, 'Kolkata'r Arabya Rajani,' 171.
13 Mitra, 'Kolkata'r Arabya Rajani,' 176.
14 Roy, *Calcutta Nights*, scene 1.
15 Roy, *Calcutta Nights*, scene 1.
16 Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 174.
17 Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 31, Oxford Scholarship Online.
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Subhadrakumar Sen (Kolkata: Bengal Publishers, 1998), 279.
19 Mighall, *Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, 34.
20 Mitra, 'Kalikata'r Galite,' 279.
21 Mitra, 'Kalikata'r Galite,' 280-81.
22 Mitra, 'Kalikata'r Galite,' 281.
23 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 84.
24 Mitra, 'Kalikata'r Galite,' 282.
25 The figure of the 'flâneur' is heavily gendered and in the works of Baudelaire and Benjamin, it is always a man.
26 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 417.
27 Roy, *Calcutta Nights*, scene 1.
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29 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Mastermashay,' in *Nirbachita Bhuter Galpa*, ed. Ranjit Chattopadhyay (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2000), 30.
30 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 21.
31 Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay, 'Andhakare,' in *Sharadindu Omnibus,* vol. 5, *Chhoto Golpo* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1986), 20-23.
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35 Bandyopadhyay, 'Andhakare,' 21.
36 Bandyopadhyay, 'Andhakare,' 22.
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38 Pile, *Real Cities*, 173.
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Liminal Existence, Decentred Gaze: Atin Bandopadhyay's "Atapurer Bhut" as a Case Study

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This paper examines "Atapurer Bhut" ("Atapur's Ghost"), a story written for young adults by Atin Bandopadhyay, one of the most well-known names within the Bengali literary canon. It studies the production of the uncanny simultaneously as a point of identification and otherisation within the liminal spaces between *bhadralok* domains and the hinterlands of the Sundarbans.[1]

Horror is a genre often closely conflated with children's literature in Bangla: most stories on ghostly apparitions are written for children, though horror fiction for adults exists. Bengali ghost stories typically explore storytelling around entities whose spectral existence occurs due to violent death or as transcendental punishment for moral shortcomings such as greed. Some become ghosts out of a sense of being wronged, due to untimely deaths rooted in momentary violence or persistent abjection. Subjection to or perpetuation of violence therefore figures as the driving force and anchoring causality that dictates the action in the story and often influences its resolution. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore's *Shey* stories describe ghosts existing as echoes of their living selves, while Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's eponymous Lullu is characterised as much by his rather human opium addiction as his inhuman magic. Similarly, one finds that spectres in Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's *Thakurmar Jhuli* as well as in works by later authors like Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay may have a compulsion towards violence, regardless of dubious trustworthiness. Upendrakishore Raychoudhuri, his son Sukumar Ray, and his grandson Satyajit Ray teeter between the comic and

the horrific to portray ghosts who may reward good behaviour or kindness, seek revenge, be vulnerable to human trickery, or elicit laughter through their actions. Lila Majumdar and Tarashankar Bandopadhyay write kindly, benevolent ghosts who remember and retain enough humanity to be humorous, as well as demigod-like manifestations who are as unpredictable as forces of nature, like the malevolent *Nishi*.

Ghost stories for children and adolescents are often written as moral parables, with wrongs righted or punished, so that the spectres can achieve their goals and move past the act of wrongdoing they committed or suffered. The still-living are also either rewarded or punished in relation to and often directly by the supernatural elements in the story, rather than by human norms or agency. The genre of horror fiction has thus been used quite often to explore disenfranchised communities and different archetypes of victimhood.

Bengali ghost stories, whether they take the comic route or pursue a sombre, sometimes scarier path of thrill or tragedy, include rewards for moral behaviour (and/or cleverness) as often as supernatural aspects and occurrences. They may be read as parables in their reliance on a sense of absolute morality, insofar as a parable is typically understood to convey ethical instructions through fiction. Moral absolutism, an ethical perspective that adjudges actions as intrinsically right or wrong and allows no compromises or circumstantial mitigation, best reflects the binaristic, polarised understanding and emulation of ethical principles characteristic of children.[2] However, as in the story being discussed in this paper, there is often a simultaneous and contradictory vein of events that resonates with divine command theory to determine how the moral norm of good rewarded and bad punished may play out in a particular situation. Divine command theory suggests that the moral righteousness of an action is directly related to whether it was performed as an act of obedience to a direct, divine command. Disobedience, even if well-meant and relatively righteous, is intrinsically immoral.[3] The story at hand is, curiously,

an example of *both* absolute morality and divine command theory, often in disruptive and contradictory ways that are left ambivalent and unresolved. Reward and punishment are not meted out through human control or agency but supernaturally endowed, as is usual in such stories. Its elements of thrill or terror, and what is eventually offered as a happy though rather unresolved ending, revolve around this notion of rewards for morally right behaviour.

The protagonist of "Atapurer Bhut" is a young girl called Kopali, who lives in penury with her father and younger brother, Kutu, in a small village in the eaves of the Sundarbans in Bengal. Her mother works as a domestic helper in an affluent household in Kolkata, to which the story exclusively refers as the "house of the Babus," where babu stands in for both mister and master, giving the reader an early taste of textual ambiguity. Her elder brother works in a hair-cutting saloon and rarely returns home. Their father studies cheap books of medical and/or spiritual remedies and peddles them, as well as his reputation as a know-it-all, in Atapur and its neighbouring villages. Kopali had to discontinue her education after the fourth grade because it became unaffordable, and she is the only member of her family who is not working for a living; even Kutu is a goatherd.

The story foregrounds Kopali's deep fascination with and love for leftover jars, discarded shoes, clothing, or utensils: for the creature comforts that her mother's employers hand down to her, which make their wattle-daub home look and feel as prosperous as she can manage. In the course of the story, Kopali's father comes home from her mother's place of employment with a mirror that used to belong to a young woman who had committed suicide days before her wedding. The arrival of this mirror marks a change in their lives, along with a gift of two eggplant saplings from Nata Dadu, a kindly elderly neighbour with a green thumb. The plot unfolds thereafter, with the reader hurried past the magical growth and fecundity of the gifted eggplant saplings, and a never-named old woman who buys a hamper of eggplants every dawn with a boxful of money.

Nata Dadu's death—confirmed and debunked and reaffirmed—runs through the story like Schrödinger's cat, even as his gift brings about a brief interlude of dreamlike prosperity which is ruined after Kopali's parents actually see the saplings, returning the family to its previous state of penury. The story ends with Kopali receiving a bank passbook with an undisclosed but substantial amount of money saved in her name, which she can access as an adult.

The story contains the ghost of a man killed by a tiger; life at the edges of a swallowing jungle and its chief hunter; a mysterious old woman who may or may not be Bonbibi herself: tropes and figures that one might expect to elicit horror and fear, if only because they remain in excess of the everyday. Instead, this ghost story, with its plethora of supernatural and preternatural elements, relies on building a sense of surrealism that proceeds primarily from the city and what it sends forth to Kopali. This includes the bank passbook which, though arranged for by someone from home, whether the goddess or the dead man, has to come from an urban location because that is where the modern civic machineries of banking lie. While Kopali is firmly located in her village at home throughout the story, Kolkata keeps acting as the absent presence that underlies her existence and complements the local, inexplicable phenomena. One may say that the story tries to draw the reader's attention to the way in which, for disenfranchised peoples like Kopali, city-based civic amenities and creature comforts are more surreal than jungles, man-eating beasts, sylvan goddesses, and similar spaces and figures which/who are not sufficiently 'civilised' to be deemed human by the mainstream.

Arjun Appadurai's introduction to *The Social Life of Things* discusses the freeing of the commodity—or the object (or service), whether commodified or not—from the restraints of objective existence and value, such that it gains a subjective value dependent on its context and circulators.[4] This accomplished, he turns to the question of the classification of an object which has usually been imagined in two

dominant ways, as either a commodity or a gift, where these are in opposition.

Marx's definition of commodity moves through parsimonious definitions and analyses into an intricate relationship between commodity and money, exchange value, and an impersonal market. Appadurai finds that this expansiveness has reduced considerably, such that commodities are special kinds of manufactured goods (or services) that are always associated with capitalist modes of production. Current constructions also largely exclude objects and services obtained through barter, which are assumed to be formally entirely separate even when they are coexisting, though Marx acknowledged a commonality of spirit between the two. Barter is currently increasing, but in a manner that allows for the fiction that it occurs between communities rather than within them. This feeds into the notion that the commodity and the gift are deeply opposed; the combination of the two leaves one with the concept that gift exchange and commodity exchange are mutually exclusive. While there has been a move away from what Appadurai calls the purist definitions of Marx and Mauss, their influence lingers in an overly simplified notion of contrasts, which parody both poles of behaviour and artificially reduce human diversities. Gifts are seen as embedding goods and services within a web of social relations, while commodity exchange is held to represent the amoral, acultural drive of goods for one another, mediated by currency rather than sociability.

Though neither is clearly spelled out, this has two major implications. First, the sign value of a commodity is always already embedded in its use value (value quote), and this sign value, depending on the context, is a subjective provisional judgement. Further, drawing from the first, the stringent demarcation between the commodity and the socially exchanged gift becomes an increasingly false demarcation. Mauss leverages his argument on the fact that gifts are also essentially exchanged: though gift-giving cultures don't have open economic retributions attached to an inequality of exchange, such parsimony

does carry a social price, albeit one implied rather than openly stated. Appadurai uses the parameters of exchange and (subjective) value to examine both Marx and Mauss and show the ways in which they largely engage with these two in similar ways, with only minor, superficial differences. One finds Appadurai making a deliberate move towards "thing" instead of commodity and gift. Appadurai thereafter emphasises the importance of context: things have subjective value, but it is not only that a thing has subjective value but that it can exist simultaneously across several contexts and different valuations. Moreover, though Appadurai apparently examines primarily the circulation of commodities, which would most probably correspond to consumption,

> Focusing on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*, construed broadly.[5]

The other conclusion that follows this definition is that the same definition of goods which goes beyond the economic restricted definition of commodified goods and services can therefore allow us to look at a broader spectrum of things as goods now, things that would normally be associated more with institutions. It might look as though by opening up definitions of the thing or commodity/gift, one is sacrificing specificity in order to discuss everything in a general sort of way. However, one may instead think of it as bringing a greater number of things within the circumscription of a particular specificity.

In "Atapurer Bhut," the eggplant saplings and ghost-ridden mirror are things at the intersection of gift and commodity in Appadurai's sense of the term, as well as fetishes that house and drive the magic. Appadurai's blurring of the boundaries between commodity and gift is of great use in reading the foregrounding of Kopali's appreciation

for the hand-me-downs her mother totes home. Further, the narrative blurs the distinctions between goods-as-salary, what Appadurai calls "things," and fetish objects, contrary to expectations about the foregrounding of fetish objects, or even the supernatural/preternatural origin attributed to them. Narrated by Kopali, the story turns jungles and tigers into banality, while empty jars of Horlicks, dalda, cups, and saucers are fetishised—none more than the passbook at the end, of course. Thus, the story intermingles the proceedings of wage labour with fetish objects—both produced through the interaction of the affluent urban household and the rural poor of the Sundarbans—and treats them alike.

"Atapurer Bhut" is narrated like a parable, but, unlike traditional parables, it offers no easy resolution that emerges with logical neatness; certain things remain unresolved and inexplicable. The reader is left to wonder whether the events of the story took place, or whether there was instead a mass hallucination in which not only Kopali but also her parents and neighbours saw their prosperity.

The story ascribes to the logic of absolute morality that is characteristic of most stories for children or even young adults: good people are rewarded, while bad people—like Kopali's ambitious parents and her elder brother—get punished. The punishment takes the form of a single sustained taste of prosperity of which they are subsequently deprived. One may also follow the internal logic of the story and formulate the moral that bad people should not be shown the eggplant saplings, or the latter will lose their magical properties. Whether those punished would be considered wrong in a framework of relative morality remains ambiguous and ultimately irrelevant.

The story involves two deaths, both unnatural, both perhaps leading to some kind of spectral apparition or haunting. A young woman, a member of the family that employs Kopali's mother Shubankari in Kolkata, commits suicide days before her wedding. Kopali is connected to her through a mirror handed down to her without them ever having met. Nata Dadu, a kind and generous

elderly neighbour, is carried away violently by a tiger and presumably devoured, since his body is never recovered. Nata Dadu is described as a good nurturer of the land to which he belongs as well as a worshipper of Bonbibi: a local in every sense of the word. He is also described as a kind, fiercely independent, rich but austere and simple-living man immersed in tending to saplings and plant growth in general. He is the eponymous ghost of Atapur and arguably the most benevolent, kind, and intelligent rewarder in the story. The two deaths are experienced very differently by Kopali and consequently described very differently in the story, even though she only hears of both deaths, rather than witnessing them. The death of the young woman, whom she has never met in life or death, is consistently romanticised; Nata Dadu's death is close—both immediate and localised—and the violence of scuffing and blood and drag marks is detailed. Several mysteries remain unresolved: whether Nata Dadu is dead, the identity of the old lady who buys Kopali's eggplants every dawn, whether the supernatural occurrences are caused by Bonbibi or the dead woman acting through her mirror, and who opened a bank account for Kopali. While she may be very earnest and sincere, Kopali's limited perspective and confused beliefs make her narratorial voice unreliable at best. That Kopali is rewarded for her morally correct behaviour is the foundation stone of the story. Further, while she gets a taste of material comfort from the objects her mother sends home from Kolkata, whether through the benevolence of her employers or her deception of them, the lasting rewards issue from supernatural sources at home. This remains the case regardless of which of the previously mentioned entities—Bonbibi, the eggplant-purchaser who might be Bonbibi, Nata Dadu, or the mirror of the dead woman—are at the root of her prosperity.

Significantly for the reader, there is a lot of ambivalence about how exactly Kopali's parents are immoral or bad and deserve punishment, or how they can spoil a magical gift-giving plant. They are a poor family, where everyone is forced to work: Kopali tends to the house,

Kutu herds goats, the eldest brother and the mother have full-time jobs. The father tries his hand at whatever comes his way and has the air of someone 'knowledgeable.' One must ask, therefore, wherein the sin resides. Is it in the father's knowledgeable air which is directly monetised, or in the possibility of insincerity in this knowledge? Does he believe in the tricks and household remedies he learns from books, or is it a trick for him too? The story refuses to disclose to readers whether Kopali's father thinks his work is one of deception, instead emphasising that his knowledge is hard earned: he invests his meagre resources in buying books, though his wife's babu might scoff at their quality. He then learns them by heart, investing not only money but effort; further, he fasts during the auspicious weekdays before he plucks the healing roots, to all indication practising his art with sincerity. He may try to turn whatever resources are at his disposal into a source of income, but he has, from what we can glean from the story, some integrity about it.

In considering Kopali's mother, readers have access only to Kopali overhearing an accusation of theft levelled against her by her formerly benevolent masters; whether she actually stole anything or was falsely blamed remains a mystery unresolved by her parents' conversation. In the privacy of their bed, Kopali's father grumbles, "Show them all our wealth, and say why would Shubhankari steal?" [translation ours]. The only other information the story vouchsafes beyond this is Shubhankari's great efficiency and reliability when it comes to her duties as a domestic maid. Even if Kopali's father exaggerates his wife's abilities, the fact remains that her employer must at least be satisfied if not relieved with Shubhankari's service. This satisfaction also explains her employer's munificence in allowing Shubhankari to take home so many things. Of course, the question of whether they are in fact bountiful or whether Shubhankari has been quietly stealing items she believes will not be missed is shrouded in mystery; the reader has no way of knowing the truth. The story only reveals that Kopali uses the things her mother brings back to make their own

household as comfortable and prosperous as she can. If her parents and brother are to be punished for being aspirational or materialistic because they come home after their sudden prosperity to enjoy the benefits, Kopali is arguably the most persistently materialistic of them all. The story dwells on her contentment with the leftovers and excesses of the Babus: she is delighted when she has to wish for a trunk because they have valuables—largely groceries—to lock up. While Kopali is hardworking, so are her parents and her brother. She is also a pretty girl, but no particular significance is attached to her appearance, even though its being mentioned in an abrupt aside implies its importance.

One may wonder, therefore, whether reward and punishment in the story lie hidden in the way in which Kopali perceives people, with those she believes to be not quite right rendered eligible for punishment. Perhaps it is instead a Romantic conception of children as residing in the age of innocence and therefore incapable of harm; a conception which is in concordance with Bengali cultural constructions of children being innocent due to their overall ignorance of good and evil. The other possibility is that of ascribing it to the divine commands of Bonbibi, and Kopali's submissive and terrified obedience to what she believes is Bonbibi's will, up to and including the goddess' whimsical liking for the mirror.

One may also trace in this story a conversion of moral capital to financial capital, in a way very evocative of the allegories and absolute morality of children's stories or of fairy tales, with Kopali being given a magical plant because of her goodness. All the supernatural occurrences in the story rely on a principle of rewarding, even as they shift from monetary rewards that eke out creature comforts to be shared by the entire family to financial rewards for Kopali. As previously discussed, one may also read this story as evoking the divine command theory with its capricious and whimsical and outright proprietorial divine/phantom superpowers, at least insofar as Kopali is convinced that Bonbibi wants the mirror for herself.

This conviction leads Kopali to vacillate between gratitude and guilt towards both Bonbibi and her mother's employers in Kolkata, and she is apologetic without any awareness of a specific error.

It is notable that Kolkata functions as a place of magic and wonder for Kopali, who is overawed by the casual generosity, the prettiness of the things that are sent to her (the saree, the mirror), and the quality and quantity of all that her family receives. Kolkata is an aspirational place from where she gets things that are not just useful but also pretty—a surplus she is otherwise not allowed—as well as the actual salary her mother receives. The salary, despite being earned, is still a matter of wonder for Kopali, insofar as it strikes her as strangely generous that her mother's employers feed and house her, allow her to take home their surplus belongings, and pay her every month as well. Shubhankari's much-praised labour becomes normalised, even obscured, in Kopali's narration. Interestingly, so does her economic relation with her employers, whom Kopali perceives as benefactors rather than employers whose generosity must be balanced against the allegation of theft and the financial insecurity into which they abruptly plunge their employee.

In some sense, therefore, for Kopali, Kolkata is not dissimilar to the other source of good things, though it depends on the generosity of affluent old men, unlike the magic of her home which depends on the fairytale logic of rewards for good behaviour. Despite the generous excess, both function through economic transactions. Kolkata, from where all good things come to her household, is an aspirational place of wonder which feeds, houses, and pays her mother a good salary and, beyond this economic transaction, further supplies her with surplus material. At home, the old lady buys the eggplants from her at increasingly high market rates, thereby inserting an economic transaction into the more openly magical space of home, the generous excess of which lives not only in the eggplants themselves but in Nata Dadu giving her the saplings. The latter also assists Kopali by overseeing the new constructions she undertakes, and is presumably

the person who starts the savings account for her. The two deaths and their magical legacies—Chhordi in Kolkata and her mirror, Nata Dadu at home and his saplings—also draw the two places into a disrupted parallelism.

If the story follows a conversion of Kopali's moral capital into financial capital, one must question the nature of this moral capital. The story ends with a punitive loss of their familial prosperity, with the money instead put in a bank account in Kopali's name, making her the sole benefactor. Nor does the story reveal whether Kolkata is a source of corruption as well as generous excess, since the employers Kopali so venerates turn out to be ruthless in terminating the employment of an efficient maid, without any proof being supplied in the story.

One must also query whether the story constructs economic and natural occurrences as equally unpredictable. There may be other similarities, since the natural bounty of the Sundarbans transmutes itself into the financial bounty expressed through the modern, and to some extent urban, token of the bank account and passbook. Objects change into money which changes into objects and then again into money time and again in the story, though the symbolism is left unclear, unless it is that of the protean nature of all things. In part this may be ascribed to the tight third-person narrative, since Kopali's perspective, as a child faced with such strange occurrences, is unfocused and rarely distinguishes between what she considers factual and her own speculations. Appadurai's problematisation of the clear binary of commodities and gifts is crucial here, in the way objects are simultaneously gifts and prizes, justifiable remunerations and unpredictable inflows of items of luxury or necessity.

The narrative of "Atapurer Bhut" is a perfect instantiation of hybrid modernity, with the bank passbook functioning as one of the most potent symbols of magic in the climacteric of the text, despite its mundane, urban associations. The material prosperity it embodies is one characterised by aspirations towards modern

urbanity: a step upwards from boiled rice to packaged noodles. However, the interplay of modernity and tradition, reality and the unreal or surreal, cannot be reified into a commendation of one above the other. For Kopali, her mother's employers, the mirror-imprisoned ghost of Chhordi, Natadadu, Bonbibi, and the eggplant-purchasing old lady are alike in the fear, awe, wonder, and trust they elicit. In effect, one may observe an inversion, such that tigers are a normal part of life while scraps of urbanity are treated as awesome and nearly magical, arguably disrupting the suturing the text offers. Kopali's narrative reverses and dwells in direct aberrance to the intended reader's perspective of Kolkata being commonplace and the Sundarbans wondrous. The jungle, the tiger, the vegetable patch, her privations, the moral deficiency and greed that make people steal from their own families are normalised, commonplace, unremarkable for Kopali. Any frustration she feels finds its way into her daily prayers to the goddess Bonbibi, which become rants and one-sided conversations for the overburdened, overwhelmed, and lonely girl. All the things a typical urban-oriented, if not urban-located, child reader would consider exceptional are normalised. All that is exceptional comes from the city: the mirror she believes is haunted, that is put under the goddess' photo either to protect herself or to appease the goddess; the abundance of hand-me-downs; the material objects that she finds unnatural and illogical. Eventually, the most surreal things start happening when they start emulating the Kolkata babus at home, with their newfound prosperity, with a house like the babus, with groceries that even include the noodles that the babus would have bought, and a domestic helper to meet her family's demands of treats. Arguably the ghostly function—insofar as ghosts are unknown, unreliable, uncontrollable variables who may be kind and generous one minute and be capricious and wreak havoc the next—is performed by Kolkata and its inhabitants, as Kopali perceives them.

The whimsical nature of the Kolkata babus, from Kopali's

perspective, and her naturalisation of much that is exoticised in mainstream texts and media, informs the disruption readers might experience in the story, despite Kopali functioning as the site for suturing. However, one must also keep in mind that Kopali is crafted by a *bhadralok*-liminal male author, and the dissonances one feels about and in relation to her are deliberately set in place. "Atapurer Bhut" both emphasises and disrupts the mainstream–marginal binary occupied by the urban-centric *bhadralok* and the rural/jungle-adjacent poor, even as it destabilises and blurs the same through the presence of the bank passbook at the end. In such a situation, and in light of all that remains ambiguous and unresolved in the narrative, one may turn to the notion of ambivalence yet again. The ambivalence of the narrative necessarily raises questions about the agency and personhood allowed to Kopali, and whether the story is feminist or merely well-supplied with female characters, human and other. Further, one must ask whether Kopali functions as the site for interpellation/suturing for the reader, exerting a gaze—with all the power relations implicit therein—on the narrated events, or whether she merely offers her narratorial perspective.

One must here discuss the story as a parable. Parables often have religious associations, which this story draws upon in depicting Bonbibi, the jungle, and the tiger who is a part of the folklore around both. The story perhaps succeeds as a parable not only because of its moral leanings but also because of the way in which it manages to perform its parabolic content. It is a deeply localised iteration of an otherwise familiar trope of divine intervention. Despite its particularities, it manages to locate itself within the domains of both mainstream Bengali (arguably *bhadralok*) literary canon and children's literature.

Ambiguities also cluster around the figures of Kopali and her mother, Shubhankari. While Kopali has a name that signals her luck, Shubhankari is an avatar of Durga as a munificent figure. This is of course neither the only nor the most prominent aspect of the

goddess, who is as whimsical as Bonbibi in her generosity and rage. Shubhankari works, presumably round the clock, in Kolkata in order to sustain and provide for her spouse and children and emerges as a prime mover of the plot and the characters, other than those tangled with the supernatural. In place of the neat dichotomy between Bonbibi and the urban household, one may see a more ambiguous relation between Bonbibi and her human double Shubhankari, who conveys prosperity home from Kolkata in lieu of her competence, if not also her loyalty. This prosperity—unlike that earned by Kopali—does not vanish from their home, though it might destabilise the space in Kolkata from which it is extracted. It also destabilises the previously discussed dialectic of spaces and benefactors. One can only speculate, as this paper has, whether the freebies hauled home by Shubhankari are evidence of her employers' munificence or her thievery; the narrative remains ambiguous about this point, as about so much else.

The story evidently structures itself around a polarising of these two spaces: the village in the Sundarbans where Kopali lives, and the space of Kolkata where Kopali's mother works. There is a notable narrative emphasis on rewards for moral correctitude, and these rewards primarily take the form of economic prosperity. One may see this both in Kopali's constant preoccupation with creature comforts and the final moment of prosperity crystallised in the bank passbook with money in Kopali's name. Following this, one may observe what is nearly a contest between the powerful entities occupying these two spaces, in ways that affect both. The awe, fear, and protection evoked by Bonbibi is nearly mirrored, in Kopali's head, by the munificence and charity of her mother's employer. Kolkata feels as mythic, or more of a truly utopian space, compared to the relative wildness of her village, nestled as it is in the jungle that hosts the goddess. At times, her exoticising and deifying of Kolkata begins to surpass her awe/attachment to the goddess and her land. However, the twist in the tale is that Kolkata eventually fails her, with her heretofore

generous employers sending Shubhankari home on the basis of ill-founded allegations that her parents continue to contest. Kolkata and the employers who had drawn Shubhankari to the city abruptly cease functioning as the charitable wonderland Kopali believes them to be. Moreover, one must consider that the mythic/supernatural reward for her moral righteousness, which arrives in the form of a bank passbook ensuring financial security for her and only her, issues from the Sundarbans despite the fact that such a token of modern urban prosperity would typically be associated more with Kolkata than the Sundarbans.

NOTES

1 Atin Bandopadhyay, "Atapurer Bhut," in *Kishore Galpasangraha* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2010), 663-676.

2 Lawrence Kohlberg, "Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development," in *The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages*, Volume 2 of Essays on Moral Development (Harper & Row, 1984).

3 Michael W. Austin, "Divine Command Theory," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed March 1, 2020, https://www.iep.utm.edu/divine-c/.

4 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

5 Appadurai, "Introduction," 3.

'Your Morality isn't the only Morality in the World': The Morality of Life, Death, and Monsters from a Care Ethics Perspective in the Anna Dressed in Blood Series

SHELBY RAGAN

As anyone who watches television shows like CW's *Supernatural* knows, morality, when it comes to monsters, is fraught with complications. Sam and Dean's clear-cut "us versus them" mentality, which fuels such mantras as "what's dead should stay dead," becomes less and less clear cut as the series progresses. In the introduction to *They Suck, They Bite, They Eat, They Kill: The Psychological Meaning of Supernatural Monsters in Young Adult Fiction*, Joni Richards Bodart claims that "monsters can . . . teach us about how to build our own concept of morality, based on how we relate to the monsters in the story—are we the 'good guy' or the 'bad guy,' acting with or without honor?"[1] As the show progresses, we see Sam and Dean oscillate between being "good guys" or "bad guys," between acting with or without honor. It is this same moral dilemma that Theseus Cassio Lowood, the protagonist of Kendare Blake's Anna Dressed in Blood series, demonstrates as he follows closely in the vein of the Winchester brothers. While Cas, as he prefers to be called, begins the series as a teenage ghost hunter intent on eliminating any threatening spirits, his moral development over the course of the narrative demonstrates that the choice of who "lives" and "dies," even among spirits, is a complicated moral issue. In this essay, I examine Cas and his growing relationship with Anna, the murderous spirit he intends to kill, from a care ethics perspective to argue that care ethics' focus on

relational identity and individual situations characterizes the growth that problematizes Cas's previously established moral perspective on ghosts. The development of Cas's morality, in light of his evolving relational identity, exemplifies how important relationships and his relational identity are to Cas's moral framework.

Care ethics is a branch of moral theory that emphasizes a person's relational identity—the identity formed in relationship with others—and situates that relational identity at the heart of morality. Care ethics theorists, such as foundational theorist Nel Noddings, assert that "relation will be taken as ontologically basic," which "simply means we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence."[2] In other words, each and every person is inherently situated within a network of relationships with other people, and a person's relational identity is constituted by all of those relationships in which they are involved. We are, in many ways, made up of the relationships we have with others. In *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education,* Noddings focuses on relationships, particularly the relationship between the one-caring (giver of care) and the cared-for (receiver of care), as the basis of morality. "An important difference between an ethic of caring and other ethics that give subjectivity its proper place," Noddings notes, "is its foundation in relation."[3] Relationships are not simply a basic fact of human existence, but they also drive the participants toward ethical behaviors through the existence of caring. The memories of caring and being cared for "form the foundation of ethical response," because "the recognition of and longing for relatedness . . . form the foundation of our ethic."[4] Thus, "we want to be *moral* in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring."[5] Essentially, the desire to maintain caring relationships motivates people to act morally, and moral action comes from maintaining caring relationships.

Within this construction, morality happens situationally because no two people will have the exact same need in any given situation. Moral

action, then, requires the one-caring to meet the needs of the cared-for in that moment. The focus on meeting specific needs in a specific moment emphasizes a second crucial aspect of care ethics, which is the importance of individual situations. Many traditional constructions of morality rest on the *universal* application of a moral tenet or directive, with the understanding that there is a set, stable definition of "right" for any instance within those certain parameters. Care ethics, on the other hand, attempts to avoid such universal principles and "reject[s] the notion of universalizability" of ethical action.[6] Instead, care ethics shifts the focus to the circumstances of the situation and the needs of the people involved, as those factors may drastically alter the appropriate, moral course of action. Noddings asserts that in theorizing the desire to "mee[t] the other morally—our insistence on caring for the other—I shall want to preserve the uniqueness of human encounters. Since so much depends on the subjective experience of those involved in ethical encounters, conditions are rarely 'sufficiently similar' for me to declare that you must do what I must do."[7] Rather than having a single solution to apply to any formulation of the equation, care ethics theorists realize that an equation cannot be solved without understanding the individual factors involved. It is only "[t]he caring attitude, that attitude which expresses our earliest memories of being cared for and our growing store of memories of both caring and being cared for, [which] is universally accessible."[8] Relational identity and situational context, then, work together to create a moral theory that becomes crucial to understanding Cas's development throughout Anna Dressed in Blood.

PRE-ANNA ETHICAL IDEALS

As Sam and Dean Winchester teach their viewers, the life of a hunter is a lonely one. When readers first meet Cas, he is almost entirely alone. His life consists of him, his mom, and their cat Tybalt moving from town to town chasing hunting jobs while she makes

money as a "mobile witch." Cas's father, from whom he inherited not only the ghost hunting mantle, but also the ritualistic knife (or athame) to do it with, was killed on a hunting case when Cas was young. Cas describes his life as "lived in a maze of packed boxes" and "a traveling circus" without roots.[9] Other than his mother and Gideon, an old family friend who occasionally helps him with cases, Cas's relationships are limited. Rather than friends, Cas merely has "contacts," old friends of his father's and others who send him tips and help with cases. He spends his time not only surrounded by, but also hunting the dead, which does not leave a lot of time for socializing. Further, Cas's isolation is, at least in part, self-imposed. Cas feels almost entirely removed from the world of the living. He says, "Death is my world. Everything else, school and friends, they're just things that get in the way of my next ghost."[10] When he moves to Thunder Bay, Cas describes the process he goes through inserting himself into the social strata at any new school. He says, "I could go and try to insta-bond with the lead jock, I suppose, but I've never been good at that."[11] He is not there to make friends; buddying up to people at school serves Cas's agenda because he sees them as a means to be "plugged into the social pipeline" because he "need[s] to get people talking to [him], so [he] can ask them questions that [he] needs answers to.[12] Therefore, in the beginning of the novel Cas's relational identity is very limited, shaped almost entirely by his relationship to death and the dead and the moral imperative he feels comes from that relationship.

Cas's sense of this own moral standing is another primary facet of his characterization at the beginning of the novel. When Cas's mother calls him a superhero, he responds by contradicting her statement and comparing himself to Grendel from *Beowulf* or Rorschach from *Watchmen* instead.[13] The comparison to Grendel denotes that Cas sees himself as isolated, murderous, and monstrous. Rorschach, on the other hand, is a moral absolutist bent on eliminating evil at any cost. By comparing himself to Rorschach, Cas is saying that he believes

that there are absolute moral truths that apply regardless of situation or context. This is the most important comparison Cas makes because it clearly outlines his understanding of his own morality and the actions he takes because of it, but his actions throughout the book don't uphold this assertion.

Despite his lack of relationships and his understanding of his own moral outlook, Cas is predisposed to caring action. While it might seem that Cas's self-imposed isolation and viewpoint on people-as-tools characterize him negatively and in opposition to the philosophies of care ethics, he demonstrates that his reasoning behind keeping his distance is actually an act of caring in itself. When his mother chastises Cas for hanging out with Carmel, the "queen bee" of his new school, and implies that he is going to end up breaking someone's heart, he informs the reader, "I don't appreciate the implication that I'm going to hurt someone. Doesn't she think I'm careful? Doesn't she know the trouble I go to in order to keep people at arm's length?"[14] Cas lives a dangerous life, one that he does not want to drag others into. Further, making friends with people only to have to leave them shortly after when he moves on to a new case is emotional strain that he is unwilling to inflict on others. He "doesn't want to miss people, and [he doesn't] want them to miss [him]."[15] On principle, Cas operates with a deficit of relationships because he believes this is the only way to avoid causing harm to others. Noddings argues, though, that "[w]herever there is a principle, there is implied its exception and, too often, principles function to separate us from each other."[16] And in this case, the principle by which Cas lives functions explicitly to separate him from others.

Additionally, rather than hunting all ghosts indiscriminately, Cas only hunts dangerous, murderous spirits. This is his one real absolute moral truth. In describing the state of Thunder Bay, Cas notes that it is "more haunted than I thought it would be, an entire layer of activity just under the dirt: whispers behind people's laughter, or movement that you shouldn't see in the corner of your eye. Most of

them are harmless—sad little cold spots or groans in the dark. Blurry patches of white that only show up in a Polaroid. I have no business with them."[17] The kind of ghost he does have business with, the "one that matters," is the kind "who is strong enough to squeeze the breath out of living throats" and willing to do so.[18] Instead of seeing ghosts, in general, as unnatural and monstrous, Cas's job is to protect others from being harmed. During the first hunt readers encounter with Cas, the hitchhiker ghost tells Cas, "I do not want to do this again," to which Cas replies, "This is the last time."[19] This ghost, like most others Cas encounters, is a victim of violence and murder; "the truly evil move on, to burn or turn to dust or be reincarnated as dung beetles. They use up all their rage while they're still breathing."[20] The victims, on the other hand, "like to pass around the badness that happened to them" while also reliving the same traumatic moment over and over.[21] With the hitchhiker ghost, Cas can sense his distress at the cyclical nature of his existence and not only kills him but also reassures him beforehand. While he may claim that he doesn't know and doesn't care what happens to the ghosts once he takes care of them, his motivation for hunting is, at heart, caring for those in danger, and even, to an extent, caring for the ghosts themselves because he is relieving them from having to endlessly re-experience their deaths. So, while not necessarily intentional, Cas does possess the natural inclination to act caringly toward others that could be developed into a caring ethical ideal.

Although he is predisposed toward caring tendencies, Cas does not have the relationships to fully craft a caring relational identity or ethical ideal, though he does desire those relationships. Noddings defines an ethical ideal as "the memory of how we have responded over time in our best encounters as carers and how others have cared for us."[22] Part of crafting an ethical ideal is reflecting on times you've cared successfully, times where you've met the needs of the person with whom you are in a relationship. Noddings asserts that it is "this ethical ideal, this realistic picture of ourselves as one-caring,

that guides us as we strive to meet the other morally. Everything depends on the nature and strength of this ideal, for we shall not have absolute principles to guide us."[23] At various instances, Cas admits that, although he is devoted to his job, at times he has the desire to settle in one place, make friends, and start a real life. His tendency to care for others by preventing their closeness to him does not prevent Cas from desiring to create bonds; he just doesn't allow himself to do so because of the damage he fears it would cause others. Instead, he gets to know the ghosts he's hunting. He says, "This is my favorite part of the hunt. Getting to know them. Hearing their legends. I want them to be as large in my mind as they can possibly be, and when I see them I don't want to be disappointed."[24] The ghosts are the most important relationships in Cas's life, and he has to make as much out of these relationships as he can, although he is not so much getting to know them as getting to know *about* them. More importantly for Cas, he doesn't have to worry about hurting anyone with those relationships because he doesn't consider ghosts people since they are already dead.

Moreover, the interactions between Cas and the ghosts he hunts do not seem to fit into this paradigm of a caring relationship that contributes to the ethical ideal because Cas is not successfully meeting the ghosts' need he identifies; Cas claims that the only need ghosts have is the need to kill because "it's the only thing they have left to do."[25] But in killing the ghosts, he does not meet that need but rather subverts it. Additionally, none of these ghosts care for Cas in any way; they are often trying to kill him as well. Noddings argues that a truly caring relationship requires reciprocity: "As we examine what it means to care and to be cared for, we shall see both parties contribute to the relation; my caring must be somehow completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring."[26] If these interactions are creating any kind of ethical ideal, it is not necessarily a caring one. These "relationships" are not reciprocal nor beneficial and so do not contribute to a caring ethical ideal. Although they

may not be caring in and of themselves, what these interactions do is lay a foundation for future care that can (and will) be taken up given the appropriate circumstances. The predisposition to care for others, especially when there is no real relationship with those others, though, is not enough to push Cas into a new framework of morality where caring is at the center.

THE ANNA TRANSFORMATION

For Cas, it takes a very unique relationship to assuage his fears and allow him to open himself up to forming caring, reciprocal relationships with others. Obviously, a caring relational identity and ethical ideal are not possible without relationships. But Cas's fear of others getting hurt prevents him from forming those relationships. What he needs is the right relationship to instigate his ethical development. This relationship comes from Anna Korlov, the ghost who Cas moves to Thunder Bay to hunt. Anna is, as Cas says, "not like any other ghost [he's] faced."[27] Anna is sentient where most ghosts, especially the ones Cas has encountered, are not. Where other ghosts are stuck playing out the same loop of their lives and death, Anna can carry on an actual conversation. She not only talks, but "she knows that she's dead" where most ghosts don't; "most are just angry and scared, more an imprint of an emotion—of a horrible moment—than an actual being. You can talk to some of them, but they usually think you're someone else, someone from their past."[28] This sentience is disturbing for Cas, it throws him off his game, but that alone does not cause Cas to change his mind about killing her. It does, however, open the door for the relationship to develop. Rather than Cas getting to know *about* Anna through research, like he does with the other ghosts, Cas actually gets to know her when she tells him about herself and her life. This sort of conversation allows Cas and Anna to form a bond in a way that he cannot with any other ghost because she can reciprocate like no other ghost has. And while

Cas originally resists this bond, because Anna's vulnerability makes it harder for him to kill her, he finds himself drawn to her and her story. Initially, Cas thinks that once he figures her out, figures out what makes her special and so powerful, he will be able to kill her. While this tactic has worked for all of Cas's past cases, it doesn't work when it comes to Anna because she truly is a unique case—and the reciprocity of their relationship enables him to care for her.

The more Cas gets to know Anna, and they bond over their mutual isolation and distance from the world of the living, the more Cas begins to care about Anna, which initiates the shift in Cas's understanding of his moral imperative. It starts with him worrying about what would happen to her once he kills her. Raised in the culture of ghost hunting, Cas was taught by both his father and Gideon not to question where the ghosts go after they are killed. It wasn't important; what was important was that they were hurting people and it was Cas's job to stop them. But knowing Anna causes Cas to begin questioning those principles he once held steadfastly. Getting to know Anna reveals to Cas that there are two sides to her: there is "the goddess of death" with "the strength of a storm, black eyes, and pale hands, not a dead person at all but a dead goddess" and "a pale girl with long, dark hair" and "a thoughtful face and soft, violet eyes" who makes something in Cas's chest "soft[en], ceas[e] to growl."[29] While the monstrous part of her may be more powerful and dangerous than anything he's ever encountered, the other part of her is just a girl, like any other girl his age (save that she's dead), who tries her best to control the monstrous goddess, especially when he is around. Because she can, at times, hold the goddess in her at bay, Cas sometimes forgets she's even dead. He even goes so far as to say that she's more "alive" than any other ghost he's ever faced.[30] Cas lives in the world of the dead, but there are no viable relationships there; the world of the living, though, doesn't fit into Cas's lifestyle. Although Anna is not actually alive, her sentience and her ability to control the murderous part of herself allow her to become the bridge

between the worlds of the living and dead—the two worlds Cas inhabits—that Cas needs to open himself up to caring relationships.

Once he begins crossing the figurative bridge of his and Anna's relationship, Cas becomes more open to other relationships as well. Pre-Anna Cas was isolated and closed off, not allowing others to get close to him for fear of them getting hurt. And these fears are not unfounded. When Cas first arrives at Thunder Bay and attempts to insert himself into the social structure of his school, he encounters the "Trojan Army," a group of three guys of the popular, meathead jock stereotype. While Cas is trying to glean information about Anna from Carmel, the queen bee of the school, the boys take it upon themselves to assert their masculinity and dominance by not only taking Cas to Anna's house, but also knocking him out and throwing him inside. This exchange ends up the worst for Mike, the leader of the group, as he gets torn in half by Anna.[31] It is this very outcome that Cas always tries to avoid, and he feels immense guilt because someone he "dragged into" his world ends up dead. But Mike's death is not Cas's fault, and it certainly is not a product of Mike and Cas forming a caring, reciprocal relationship. Despite this initial setback, as Cas forms a relationship with Anna he also lets Carmel and Thomas, a young psychic, get close to him. Thomas and Carmel both shift from tools in Cas's arsenal to people he willingly calls his friends. Admittedly, Carmel and Thomas both also tend to have a foot in both worlds, Thomas because his psychic abilities and witch heritage attune him to the world of the dead and Carmel because she refuses to be cut out of the action after Mike's death and being "in on the secret" tends to take them out of the living world a bit.[32] But it turns out that these bridge-friendships are the kind of friendship Cas needs. It is only those who are aware of both worlds and Cas's involvement in them that can truly understand Cas and work to care for him appropriately. These three, new relationships (as well as the ones with his mother and Gideon) can be categorized as caring and work toward developing his ethical ideal because reciprocity exists;

Cas can care for and be cared for by people who understand his needs because they also understand the situation and context of his life.

CONCLUSION

Cas's new openness to relationships definitively affects his moral status as it causes him to deviate from his one "absolute" moral truth. As Cas and his friends dig deeper and deeper into Anna's past, they discover that Anna is not just another garden variety vengeful spirit. Through a spell, they see that Anna's mother, a powerful black magic witch, murdered Anna and put a curse on her that created the murderous, monstrous goddess Anna fights so hard to control. It is here that relational identity and situational context come into play. Through the development of his relationships with Anna, Carmel, and Thomas, Cas's relational identity has changed. He is not just a ghost hunter; he is Anna's friend, and that changes things. Now, Cas is not just killing a murderous spirit, he is losing a friend and does not know where or to what fate he is sending her. Additionally, Anna is not just Cas's friend; she is a victim of dark magic, who never wanted to kill anyone and wouldn't have done so if not forced. Context and relational identity are particularly important to this situation because once they know Anna and know the truth of her story the good and right thing to do becomes to help her, not to destroy her, which undermines Cas's understanding that all ghosts who kill are to be killed themselves. Because of his relationships, Cas's morality has developed so that he goes from believing in an absolute truth to valuing context, from having to kill Anna to having to save her. And this development, in turn, saves him. Cas finds out that an extremely powerful voodoo spirit, even more powerful than Anna, was the thing that killed his father and in doing so attached itself to his athame and has been absorbing the power of all the ghosts Cas has killed since. Desperate for Anna's power, the Obeahman "obeahs" Cas, basically cursing him so that his insides essentially liquefy, if he

doesn't kill Anna to feed the Obeahman. It takes a combination of Thomas's and his grandfather Morfran's magic, Carmel's and Cas's mother's support, and Anna's power to sever the tie between the Obeahman and the athame and save Cas's life. If Cas had stuck to his absolute moral truth and killed Anna, the Obeahman would've kept growing stronger and feeding on other ghosts until it was too powerful to defeat. It is only because Cas allows himself to develop relationships, which in turn change the way he understands right and wrong, that the Obeahman can be defeated.

Cas's struggle is not necessarily finding his identity as a "good guy" or a "bad guy," but rather deciding which relationships he will let inform his relational identity, and, in doing so, dealing with a moral dilemma about how he relates to "monsters." The basis of Cas's character growth is the development of his ethical ideal. What is great about this book is that Cas's moral development is not some reform from bad to good. He was always a "good guy" doing what he thought, at least, was good work in stopping murderous ghosts. But had he not opened himself up to caring relationships and re-centered his morality around his relational identity and moral imperative to care for Anna, things would have ended up much worse for him. Although Cas's relationship with Anna is not ultimately sustainable, the experience of it has contributed to the further development of his ethical ideal, which he can then draw on in future relationships. The emphasis here is not on one form of morality trumping another or one being right and another wrong; it is to show how a relational identity and caring ethical ideal work together to inform moral decisions and, especially in Cas's case, can show a completely different perspective on the world. Cas, with his tendency to care for others, was always right on the cusp of care ethics, but his lack of relationships held him back. Developing relationships with others, redefining the way he related to his "monsters," changed and broadened Cas's understanding of the way the world works. Relationships do, at least in part, define us, and for Cassio Lowood they also save us.

NOTES

1 Joni Richards Bodart, *They Suck, They Bite, They Eat, They Kill: The Psychological Meaning of Supernatural Monsters in Young Adult Fiction* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2011), xxiv.
2 Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 3-4.
3 Noddings, *Caring,* 6.
4 Noddings, *Caring,* 6.
5 Noddings, *Caring,* 6.
6 Noddings, *Caring,* 5.
7 Noddings, *Caring,* 5.
8 Noddings, *Caring,* 5.
9 Kendare Blake, *Anna Dressed in Blood* (New York: Publisher, 2011), 15, 21.
10 Blake, *Anna,* 138.
11 Blake, *Anna,* 42.
12 Blake, *Anna,* 42.
13 Blake, *Anna,* 22.
14 Blake, *Anna,* 58.
15 Blake, *Anna,* 170.
16 Noddings, *Caring,* 5.
17 Blake, *Anna,* 31-32.
18 Blake, *Anna*, 32.
19 Blake, *Anna,* 13.
20 Blake, *Anna*, 38.
21 Blake, *Anna,* 62.
22 Noddings, *Caring*, 79.
23 Noddings, *Caring*, 5.
24 Blake, *Anna*, 57.
25 Blake, *Anna*, 47.
26 Noddings, *Caring*, 4.
27 Blake, *Anna*, 144.
28 Blake, *Anna*, 102.
29 Blake, *Anna*, 77, 84, 101, 103.
30 Blake, *Anna*, 189.
31 Blake, *Anna*, 78.
32 Blake, *Anna*, 173.

Monstrous Rage: Using the Supernatural to Navigate Black Horror and Rage

CASSANDRA SCHERR

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

"Strange Fruit," written by Abel Meeropol and performed by Billie Holiday[1]

INTRODUCTION: LYNCHING AN AMERICAN PASTIME

In her 1969 biography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou reflected on one of the recurring fears of her childhood by stating that "the Black woman in the South who raises sons, grandsons, and nephews had her heartstrings tied to a hanging noose. Any break from routine may herald for them unbearable news."[2] Why did Angelou fear the "hanging noose"? In that specific moment, it was because her brother Bailey was a few hours late, his tardiness causing panic within Angelou's household due to the very real possibility that he could have been lynched. Angelou grew up in a time and location known for, as Billie Holiday sings, its "strange fruit" or, in explicit terms, the prevalence of lynching Black men and women as a form of systematic racialized terrorism. Angelou feared the "hanging noose" that day and every day of her life because her lived reality proved that the murders of these Black (usually) men were not the deviant actions of one "bad apple" but a deliberate system of terror

used to keep her Black community "in their place," that is to say, in fear of and beholden to the white community.

Many readers today would like to look at these illustrations of the United States as seen through a young Angelou's eyes and dismiss them as examples of an unfortunate but long-gone history. However, as the murder of Black boys such as Tamir Rice[3] makes clear, fear of a "hanging noose" is still as real today as it was during Angelou's childhood. The difference between the reality of being Black in America today and in Angelou's childhood is that the "hanging noose" is more likely to be an authority figure's gun or, as the murder of George Floyd has shown, their knee. Furthermore, as the harassment, abuse, and murder of people of colour become more visible, American society is being forced to face the fact that not only is this hanging noose still as real and dangerous as ever, but also that the resulting heartache of mothers who will lose their children to it isn't, and never truly was, limited to Black women in the South. It is a modern understanding of these new realities of Black horror and the subsequent Black rage at these indignities that inspired Victor LaValle to pull from his experiences as a Black man growing up in Queens, New York to create a work that depicts the realities of race, class, and gender through the lens of speculative fiction, giving a larger-than-life quality to true-to-life experiences. This paper will argue that through his graphic novel *Victor LaValle's Destroyer,* LaValle attempts to both highlight the modern dimensions of the brutalities inflicted on Black and Brown people in the United States and use supernatural elements to give us new understandings of Black people's navigations of these lived horrors. In doing so, LaValle creates a story that directly challenges culturally created images of Black femininity that stereotypically apply to Black motherhood and subsequently transforms the *Frankenstein* story from a story of horror with blackness in it to a story of Black horror.[4] However, unlike typical Black horror narratives where the Black characters though central are still victims, *Destroyer* creates a space where a

single Black mother takes control of stereotypes such as the angry Black woman and the superstrong Black mother and refashions them into tools of her monstrous rage, making her both sympathetic and monstrous. In a world overflowing with monsters, both mythic and real, we will first analyse how *Destroyer* reimagines the *Frankenstein* motif to create a narrative of Black horror. This will lead us to a conversation on how, by embracing a narrative of monstrous rage in conjunction with the supernatural, LaValle uses Black horror and monstrosity as the ultimate equalizer that creates a space for Black resistance, connection, and conversation, even beyond the grave.

DESTROYER: A MODERN STORY OF BLACK HORROR

In *Destroyer*, LaValle takes an unflinching look at the modern realities and horrors of systematic oppression faced by Black people in America by crafting a modern reimagining of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. We enter a world where Dr. Frankenstein's legacy is upheld by The Lab, a shadowy institution that specializes in technological development largely used for the purposes of security and military action. However, its true purpose is to hunt down and capture Frankenstein's Monster who after 225 years is not only still alive but also in possession of extraordinary powers such as super strength, speed, and near indestructibility: abilities that the Lab's director believes can be used to unlock, and then sell, the secret of eternal life. Forced to leave his hiding place in Antarctica due at least in part to melting ice caps, the Monster, disgusted by the horrors man inflicts on the natural world, tears a destructive path back towards the source of his own human-caused pain, his long dead "father" Dr. Frankenstein. We are told that this path includes destroying the Lab and everyone connected to it. From this beginning, we are initially led to believe that "the destroyer" the story's title references is the Monster and that the conflict and horror of the story will focus on the supernatural and science-fiction elements introduced by the *Frankenstein* motif.

Indeed, those elements are important to the narrative, but only in the ways in which they aid the true protagonists—Dr. Josephine Baker, a brilliant but often undermined scientist, and her reanimated 12-year-old son Akai.

At first, when the Lab sends operatives to find Dr. Baker, it is implied that they are there for her protection. The Monster has reason to attack all the Lab's scientists, also called alchemists, meaning that as a former employee Dr. Baker is in extreme danger. However, it becomes clear that Dr. Baker's former employers do not care about or even particularly respect her. The operatives have been instructed to drag her back to the Lab if she will not come voluntarily. This disregard for Dr. Baker's autonomy is the first indication that the Lab is only interested in what can be gained by using her and her unparalleled brilliance. We learn that all the wondrous technological advancements that we see throughout the narrative, such as advanced artificial intelligence, extreme military machinery, and the reanimation of the dead, are due to Dr. Baker's work. Thus, the Lab's director wants her "collected" because she sees Dr. Baker as a resource and a wayward toy to be called to order. It is even implied that the Director had encouraged Dr. Baker's feelings of isolation when she was younger in order to control her, wanting Dr. Baker's first and, ideally, only loyalty to be to the Lab. When Dr. Baker announced her pregnancy with Akai, the Director quickly had her "phased out" because "the Director took it personally somehow."[5] This lack of respect is made even more evident when the white male operatives sent to find her display ingrained sexist and racist views. Their prejudices are immediately made clear upon their first meeting with Dr. Baker when they enter her favorite bar and, in an attempt to locate her, they approach every table but hers. When Dr. Baker queries, "You went to every table asking for me. But you never stopped at mine. Why is that?"[6] they push the oversight back onto her by stating, "Well, for one, you seem to have scrubbed all images of yourself anywhere. It's almost like you're trying to hide from the

world."[7] In these men's minds, the issue at hand is that Dr. Baker is making things difficult for them. They echo the statements of many real-world authority figures by maintaining that Dr. Baker is the problem because she is hiding from them, ignoring their commands, and not complying with their desire to forcibly return her to a place where she hasn't been employed for over 12 years. Through this interaction we start to see one of Dr. Baker's long-standing pains and one of the reasons for her monstrous rage: the deliberate and consistent disregard for Black women's abilities, desires, and pains.

As a Black woman, Dr. Baker's intelligence, abilities, and earned positions have constantly been questioned. As she explains, in all her years as a scientist, she has "usually been treated in two ways. Either I've been invisible, or I've been an angry Black woman. I can't describe how frustrating this has been. But I'm going to try."[8] When she questions why the agents didn't stop at her table, the implication is that she knows they did not approach her table because she is a Black woman and that they assumed at a glance that she had nothing worthwhile to tell them. This is just another example of the wall of racism and sexism that she has climbed all her life.[9] She also makes it clear that she doesn't appreciate them trying to collect her, cautioning, "I would advise you to go back to Maryland, tell the Director you couldn't find me. I won't warn you again."[10] To the agents this is a shallow threat by a woman whom they initially perceive to be weaker than them. But for the reader, her declaration of "I won't warn you again" is our first peek at the rage and potential violence roiling under Dr. Baker's calm veneer, a veneer that has been eroding for some time and is about to shatter.

Destroyer is a story with numerous monsters both real and supernatural, but it becomes apparent that the most dangerous and potentially destructive force in this story is Dr. Baker's rage. Dr. Baker is a woman shaped by cultural notions of a "strong Black mother" stereotype that tells Black women that a "good Black mom should be superstrong to protect her children, but she is also responsible

for controlling her children and preventing them from getting into trouble."[11] Leaving everything behind—including her husband, Akai's father—Dr. Baker embraces this ideal with a single-minded devotion, focusing all her resources and energy on building a stable and protected life for her child, and for a time she succeeds. As she says, "I had tenure. Akai attended St. Ignatius. I thought we'd made it. I assumed we were safe. But I was wrong."[12] Dr. Baker was wrong because nothing she could do could protect her son and their idyllic life from being shattered by "the hanging noose."

The noose, or in this case a police officer's gun, did what both nooses and guns are made to do: it killed. A police officer murdered Akai, because he was scared by a 911 report of an 18- or perhaps 20-year-old Black man with a rifle, a report made by a woman of whom the reader is never shown more than a silhouette. However, we see this silhouette through the window of a nice home in a well-to-do neighborhood, with the woman's voice fading in and out of range as Akai walks by her home as unaware of her as she is hyper-aware of him. From this figure's no-nonsense ponytail, the way she talks, and the clear vigilance with which she watches her neighbourhood, we can easily imagine who this woman is and see the cultural systems at play. The first few coils in Akai's noose were made by this "concerned" likely white woman who did not hesitate to weaponize her "fear" by calling the police and further empowered that fear with assumptions about Black youth. Akai was 12 years old when he was murdered, and with his big doe eyes and round baby face, he is drawn in a way that makes his youth undeniable. Yet it is unsurprising that he was reported to be 18 or 20, as "research has shown that Black boys, in particular, are often perceived as less innocent and more adult than their white male peers and, as a result, they are more likely to be assigned greater culpability for their actions."[13] That perception of a "lack of innocence" led to an assumption on the part of the caller, as in Tamir Rice's case, that Akai was much older and must be holding a dangerous weapon. Thus, she told officers that a Black

18/20-year-old man was in front of her house with a rifle when in fact Akai, walking home from his little league game, was carrying his baseball bat. The final coils in Akai's noose were tied by the police officer who confronted him. This officer took his fear of the situation and combined it with a "shoot first ask questions later" attitude so common among police in the United States. He chose to leap from his vehicle with his gun already drawn and, once again paralleling the Tamir Rice case, shot Akai two seconds later. What could this officer have seen in two seconds that made Akai deserving of deadly force? The narrative suggests that he saw the same thing in Akai that the two agents from the Lab saw in Dr. Baker: the same blackness and perceived lack of innocence that allowed the court system of this world to decide that Akai's death was justified. After all, he was Black, it was dark, and the police officer was scared. Left with a dead son and denied any justice for his death, Dr. Baker's overwhelming grief quickly transformed into an awe-inspiring rage.

The world expected Dr. Baker to "move on" or at most embrace the iconic stance of the Black mother in grief. As Melissa Harris-Perry discusses, Black women's and particularly Black mothers' suffering has become "the conduit through which new conversations on race, class, and vulnerability began."[14] Harris-Perry specifically discusses disasters such as Hurricane Katrina's destruction of New Orleans where "black women became the main characters through whose suffering and resilience the media told the story"[15] of untold loss, shaping this story with image after image of Black mothers in distress. We see a similar strategy apply to the cases where Black men and boys are killed, leaving their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters to grieve in front of the cameras. Likewise, in *Destroyer*, the assumption was that Dr. Baker would continue to perform as Black women are trained, embracing her status as a "strong Black woman":

> The strong black woman is easily recognizable. She confronts

> all trials and tribulations. She is a source of unlimited support for her family. She is a motivated, hardworking breadwinner. She is always prepared to do what needs to be done for her family and her people. She is sacrificial and smart. She suppresses her emotional needs while anticipating those of others. She has an irrepressible spirit that is unbroken by a legacy of oppression, poverty, and rejection.[16]

Applied to Dr. Baker, this means that society expected her to sacrifice her rage to remain a resilient and admirable icon of Black respectability for her people. After all, a "strong Black woman" never works for herself, she works for the world.

However, Dr. Baker isn't Maya Angelou's Mamma willing to quietly and respectably grieve for a son who will never return home. She is also not taking any tips from her namesake, the dancer Josephine Baker. Dr. Baker is not interested in crafting consumable performances for the world's enjoyment or benefit. She is interested in action and transformation. Thus, she takes her monstrous grief and directs it towards a monstrous rage. She combines this with the intellect that regularly earned her censure and mistrust to rebuild her son anew. She not only brings him back to life but rebirths him as more powerful than ever before, so powerful that he will never be killed by some authority figure's gun or anything else again. However, this isn't where Dr. Baker stops. If it were, she would be a creator and not a destroyer. Dr. Baker creates her own version of Frankenstein's monster through Akai, making him both her son and her tool. She sees Akai's successful reanimation as the first step in a war. She is motivated not only by love and grief but also by rage, thus constructing Akai to be an unbeatable weapon. What Dr. Baker wants is a revolution, for as she tells us, "This whole damn country is one big civil war monument. It's time to tear it down."[17]

THE MONSTER SPEAKS BACK: USING THE SUPERNATURAL TO TELL NEW STORIES

When one considers Dr. Baker's and Akai's story, one wonders why the supernatural elements of the plot were necessary at all. Why bring in the spectacular and near-superhero abilities of Frankenstein's monster? Why have the various "living dead" versions of Akai? When the reader is first introduced to Akai, he is a literal ghost in the machine, speaking to his mother from beyond the grave in the form of an artificial intelligence. Readers then meet his reanimated form as an immortal superpowered undead child. One could argue that LaValle has set out to tell a speculative fiction horror story, and the uncontrollable violence of the Monster and the disturbing thought of a child as a living corpse add horror to the story. However, the fact remains that the story was already horrific without those elements.

When one considers the true horror of this story, there is nothing fanciful about it. There is nothing unique or unknown about Dr. Baker's pain. There is certainly nothing so mysterious about her experience that it requires a supernatural intervention for us to see it. As modern-day experiences have shown, all that is needed to truly see the pain of Black mothers like Dr. Baker is a population with easy access to cell phones and the ability to connect to social media. In the United States, society is inundated with historical examples, modern videos, and testimonies of the exact type of violence that Dr. Baker and Akai experience. In fact, it is often difficult to escape these stories. As Robin R. Means Coleman explains, when one creates Black horror (not to be confused with horror that happens to have Black people in it), what one adds is a "narrative focus that calls attention to racial identity, in this case Blackness—Black culture, history, ideologies, experiences, politics, language, humor, aesthetics, style, music, and the like."[18] Thus, by simply telling those common stories of Black pain, stories that explore the racialized realities of extreme poverty, a history of violence, the systematic abuse of Black

and Brown people, and authorities that either turn a blind eye to or even encourage these abuses, one naturally tells a story of undeniable horror. In a reality where one can watch the murder of a Black man at the hands of the police, one doesn't need make-believe to find horror. As LaValle puts it in a letter to his readers, "I wonder which seems more fantastical: that a woman could bring her dead son back to life, or that our country might ever hold itself accountable for the injustices it has perpetrated."[19] However, where the supernatural does not necessarily add to the horror elements of *Destroyer*, it does serve several essential purposes.

First, using the supernatural as part of a Black narrative has a long tradition in Black storytelling. There is a reason why folklorists such as Virginia Hamilton include "tales of the supernatural" as its own subcategory in Black folktales. These stories were not only common but also necessary, because the supernatural is one way to "even the playing ground." Black folktales often have main characters who for all practical purposes are weaker than the other characters in the story, just as the slave has significantly less power than the master. Thus these "weaker" characters are often given a skill, such as being extremely clever to win over stronger foes.[20] Similarly, supernatural abilities can also be used by a main or an allied character to make the defeat of a stronger foe possible. In tales such as "John and the Devil's Daughter," it would be impossible for a very human John to defeat the Devil, if it were not for the supernatural power of his ally, the Devil's Daughter.[21] Similarly, it would be impossible for Dr. Baker to truly be a threat to corporations like the Lab or the US government if it were not for her status and abilities as an alchemist. Though the characters say that alchemist is just a title the Lab is using for its scientists, it is clear that the term is deliberately used to acknowledge that for the reader, Dr. Baker's (and Dr. Frankenstein's) work at times feels more akin to the occult than science, with Dr. Baker going so far as to claim that somehow extreme grief is what helped both her and Dr. Frankenstein succeed in creating their "monsters."[22] Thus,

these supernatural elements were needed in order to allow Dr. Baker to express her rage in these extreme ways and to help her escape the common stereotypical tropes society creates for Black women.

LaValle's use of the supernatural also gives Dr. Baker the opportunity to speak back to the audience. By the end of her story, Dr. Baker has shifted from victim to main antagonist, with her rage pushing her to ignore everything beyond her own need for revenge, including Akai's own autonomy and needs as her child. When Akai tells her that he is not willing to kill, that he does not want to be violent and can't let her destroy the world, instead of respecting his desires, Dr. Baker attempts to use her abilities as an alchemist to take control of his body, attempting to force him to be the weapon of destruction she wants as opposed to the son she has. In doing so she has embraced her monstrous rage, becoming something akin to the witch character found in folklore and fairy tales. As Sheldon Cashdan describes, the witch exists in these stories to "pose an external threat to the hero or heroine, [and] she magnifies inner flaws and frailties in the reader."[23] While *Destroyer* is not a fairy tale, its speculative fiction elements are drawing from many of the same ideas. Dr. Baker may be coded as a witch-like character because she represents an extremely powerful woman who, for better or worse, works against the norm, seems to have power beyond ordinary human understanding, is defined by her rage (a feature or idea that many work to purge from themselves), and is a threat to a main character, Akai. By the end of the story, Dr. Baker has become a threat to the very thing she swore to uphold at all costs—Akai's safety. She is now willing to aggressively force Akai to obey her even when that obedience will erode elements of his core personality, what she calls his "tender heart."[24] The very act of asking and then attempting to force him to become a killing machine hurts Akai in profound ways. Thus, like all antagonist witches, Dr. Baker dies. In the story, her death is depicted as a side effect of Akai's rebellion; in resisting

her control, Akai accidently distracts his mother, which allows the Monster to murder her. But her death can also be understood as a kind of purging of rage, destroying a feature that many fear and thereby allowing Akai's more even and acceptable temperament to take over.

If this were a fairy tale or even the typical representation of a Black woman's rage, Dr. Baker's "madness" and death would be all we would have seen. However, one of the most important functions of the supernatural in *Destroyer* is that it creates an opportunity for Akai and his mother to continuously discuss their experiences, perspectives, and feelings. What shifts this story from a reactionary tale or a stereotype to a more mature well-rounded narrative is the opportunity to speak to our "witch." To Cashdan, "the very act of engaging the witch, the ability to experience what she thinks and feels, can be growth-enhancing."[25] The main point of *Destroyer* is that Dr. Baker and Akai are not only engaging in discussions that allow Dr. Baker to explain the shape of her pain and rage, but also that as her son, Akai inherently cares about this information. The discussions motivate him to listen, learn, and grow as well as to develop a deeper bond with his mother. The supernatural elements that facilitate Akai's reanimation are essential to the story because they allow these difficult conversations to happen even after extreme tragedy and death. Furthermore, Akai and his mother are only able to reach a place of true understanding and mutual respect after Dr. Baker's death.

CONCLUSION: THE SUPERNATURAL AND BLACK POTENTIAL

In the end, Dr. Baker doesn't get to burn down the world. Instead, like every witch, she dies. However, anticipating her own death, Dr. Baker has her thoughts, personality, and voice uploaded and integrated with the technology she had used to rebuild her son,

allowing her to become a part of Akai—an act that once again creates a literal ghost in the machine, now with Dr. Baker being the one to speak to Akai from beyond the grave. This allows Akai and his mother to continue their conversations, even though all decision making is now left to Akai. In the last frames of the graphic novel, we are with Akai watching a baseball game, and he says to the voice of his mother, "Mom I hear you. I do. I'm going to think about everything you've said. But right now, I've got a good seat for a little league baseball game. All I want to do is watch these kids play."[26] We don't end this story with rage and violence. We end it with a picture of Black pleasure: of happiness, contentment, and peace. Dr. Baker's monstrous rage pries open a space where a little Black boy who has been violated by his society can find a perfect moment of safety and happiness. More importantly, we end in a space where the important conversations can continue. Akai tells his mother that "he hears her" and that he is thinking about what she is saying, but he also refuses to live in a world of constant rage and cynicism. LaValle ends *Destroyer* with a letter to his readers in which he writes:

> There's a reason Akai refuses cynicism in this comic, a reason why he won't succumb to rage. Because Akai Baker embodies the best that humanity has to offer. Despair doesn't do a damn thing. And fear only turns people into animals. But as long as we have kids like Akai in the world, there's still a chance for us. The trick then, is to make sure they actually are in the world, living, breathing, growing up, growing old.[27]

Using the supernatural, LaValle gives readers the opportunity to truly hear and understand Dr. Baker's perspective. At the same time, he creates a world that gives people like Akai a fighting chance. The world needs people like Akai, people who intimately understand the realities of Black horror, who can understand both their story

and the story of others, yet are still willing to build and not simply destroy. It is through people like Akai and stories like *Destroyer* that one can start to see beyond the horror of Black pain and begin to see the potential for Black pleasure.

NOTES

1 Abel Meeropol and Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit" (Commodore, 1939), https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/billieholiday/strangefruit.html.
2 Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Random House, 1970), 114.
3 Tamir Rice was a 12-year-old Black boy murdered by Cleveland Ohio Police. Police received reports that the toy gun Rice was playing with was a real gun and in response shot Rice almost immediately after arriving on the scene. Richard A. Oppel Jr., "National Questions Over Police Hit Home in Cleveland," *New York Times*, December 8, 2014.
4 As Robin R. Means Coleman explains in *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present,* most horror is horror with blackness, meaning that it is horror that happens to have Black people in it. This is to be distinguished from Black horror, which is horror that focuses on Black people's narratives and experiences.
5 Victor D. LaValle et al., *Victor LaValle's Destroyer* (Los Angeles: CA: BOOM! Studios, 2019), chapter 1.
6 LaValle, *Destroyer*, chapter 1.
7 LaValle, chapter 1.
8 LaValle, chapter 3.
9 LaValle, chapter 6.
10 LaValle, chapter 1.
11 Sinikka Elliott and Megan Reid, "The Superstrong Black Mother," *Contexts* 15, No. 1 (2016): 49, https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504216628840.
12 LaValle, *Destroyer*, chapter 3.
13 Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia González, "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood," SSRN Electronic Journal, June 27, 2017, 2, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695.
14 Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 15.
15 Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*, 15.
16 Harris-Perry, 21.
17 LaValle, *Destroyer*, chapter 6.

18 Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (London: Routledge, 2011), 7.
19 LaValle, *Destroyer*, End Letter.
20 Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (New York: Borzoi, 1985), x.
21 Hamilton, *The People Could Fly*, 107-115.
22 LaValle, *Destroyer*, chapter 3.
23 Sheldon Cashdan, *The Witch Must Die: How Fairy Tales Shape Our Lives* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 17.
24 LaValle, *Destroyer*, chapter 1.
25 Cashdan, *The Witch Must Die*, 252.
26 LaValle, *Destroyer*, chapter 6.
27 LaValle, End Letter.

The Symbolic Significance of Selected Miracles in The New Testament

SHREYASI DAS ROY & ABIGAIL SIMONE BEAUCASIN

INTRODUCTION

Institutions, traditions, norms and values have been existing across cultures, societies and epochs of Mankind. They have been instrumental in framing the existential, social and historical evolution of people. Their provisions of beliefs, principles and conventions are held to be fundamental in the creation of any specific discourse within the human society. Moulding of the human mind (individual conscience based on personal opinions) and social duties according to the prevailing conditions (collective conscience) takes place under two kinds of influences—(a) the immediate surroundings, and (b) the perception of the ideas related on a one-to-one basis. Excellent examples from recorded data and excavations of historical sources, where society's flourish is seen as reflected in the literature, craftsmanship and architecture points to its structure and its efficiency of being an institution.

The social institution of Religion has been effective in both the past and present for the formulation and evaluation of certain values and responsibilities in the dynamics of unity among people. Its systematic approach in dealing with the sense of human faith, religious ideas and belief has imbued the introduction of the 'Supernatural'[1]—a topic of heated debates and recent academic pondering.

The Oxford Dictionary describes 'Supernatural'[2] both as an adjective and noun, events which "cannot be explained by the laws of science"[3] and something which "may seem to involve gods or

magic".[4] Dennis Waskul and Marc Eaton, in their Introduction to *The Supernatural in Society, Culture and History* discuss the term, its meaning and usage quite clearly. They opine that the 'Supernatural'[5] would consist of ghosts and witchcraft. Falling back on David Hufford's cultural authority (institutionalized religious belief) and the "intergenerational transmission of values",[6] Waskul and Eaton also state a distinct difference between the interchangeable words 'Supernatural'[7] and 'Paranormal'[8] and suggest that it is the structure and working of cultural authority which legitimizes certain phenomena as supernatural (which may or may not be included in the theological discourse).

The element of the Supernatural, therefore, is a theme persistent across generations and is universal. It is considered to be a sensitive topic. The scope of it, when dealt with much consideration, gradually expands through the rational perspective of the term itself. According to E. Ritchie,[9] the dynamics of the Supernatural has a considerable effect on the ethical standards of any religion. Morality and the belief in the Supernatural are somewhat indirectly proportional to each other.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The second narrative part of the Bible[10] is the New Testament. It is a collection of ecclesiastical literature, consisting of twenty-seven books, written by followers of Jesus. It embodies the doctrines and dogma of the Christian faith, dealing with Christ's history, the establishment of the early Church and the Christian take on Apocalypse.

The Galilean Man's ministries are referred to as Miracles all throughout the Four Gospels of the Bible, with the Gospel of John being unique among the rest. As the name itself suggests, the Miracle refers to an event or a phenomenon which is marvellous and wonderful, something which the common man would not experience

himself or in the immediate surroundings. William Dewar in his article 'What is a Miracle?'[11] states that it falls under the umbrella term, Supernatural. In this case, the miracles are seen not only as a distinct experience but also as the manifestation of reality along with the attestation of a special message. Therefore, another reading from the point of view of the transcendental ethics presented in the Christian doctrine may be considered (instead of conforming to the natural order of the humans), establishing it as a wonder work, only to be left unexplained by the laws of nature.

THE MIRACLES

It is interesting to note the overall consideration of the Miracles (Jesus' Ministries) from the theological point of view. Miracles are seen as an act of the Supreme, an act of divinity, a work filled with grace, showing Christ's duality as both a human and a spiritual existence (Son of God), a profound effect which continues to resonate among people today through faith and belief.[12] These events may be divided into various theme-based groups—food, water, healing and death. They are important not only as testimony to Christ's lifestyle on earth, but as a reflection of Judean and Palestinian society, bearing important features of the Jewish culture and tradition. Unlike popular explanation, this paper aims to look into the existing elements of the Supernatural present in these events, which are otherwise seen as ecclesiastical occurrences.

The Miracle of Jesus turning water into wine and the Feeding of the multitude majorly deal with the theme of food. The first event took place at a wedding feast in Cana and only the Gospel of John[13] narrates the story. Alistair McGrath states it to be the "first public ministry of Jesus . . . at Cana in Galilee".[14] According to this, Christ, invited to the wedding, arrived along with his disciples, and on the request of his mother Mary, miraculously turned water into wine after the existing supply of wine got depleted.

The verses do not do justice to the event since the turning of water into wine was only understood when the governor (master) of the feast tasted it and complimented its taste. It is, however, considered to be socially very significant due to certain reasons.

In a Jewish household, a wedding is a social sanctity and the serving of wine is second in importance. Jesus' response to his mother's request with the words "Mine hour is not yet come" creates a sense of wonder, and indirectly points to the supposed divinity of Christ. Special attention is paid to the material workings. The jars used for the event were six water pots made of stone, a container used specifically for Jewish purification rituals. The Hebrew word "firkins"[15] is translated to a unit of measurement, stating that amount which the jars could hold. William Barclay[16] strongly holds the view that certain instances mentioned bring out the theme of faith explicitly. According to him, it was the confidence and request of Mary which played a major role in his first wonder work.[17] Although there is lack of public account as first-hand witness, the matter is highlighted by the unnatural circumstances under which the conversion takes place.

The next Miracle under this category is the narrative about the Feeding of the Multitudes. It has been mentioned in the three books of Gospel, with five thousand people as witnesses. This story shows Jesus as a supplier of the needs of humans, setting the foundation for the famous connotation of the Bread of Life.[18] The Gospel of John states that Jesus asked his disciples to distribute five loaves of barley bread and two fishes, after giving thanks to the supernal power and breaking them. The food, however, does not finish, but keeps on multiplying, resulting in some leftovers later collected by the disciples. The fact that the food increases only after passing through Jesus' hand is seen as an act of creation by Steele.[19]

A symbolic act associated with the principle of giving and helping, it also draws a parallel with the provision of manna and quail by Yahweh to the Israelites through the leadership of Moses (Jesus and Moses are therefore acting as mediums of intercession between the

human realm and the world of the Supernatural), an occurrence sacred to Judaism.[20] An emphasis is also laid on Jesus praying, while looking up to the sky. Johannes Weiss considers that the supply was providential, hinting at its moral nature and the effect it had on certain writers of liturgy.

The second category of miracles deals with Christ's rule over the Natural order, with the incidents of Jesus walking on water and calming the storm (on different occasions). The first incident is said to have occurred on the same day, as the feeding of the multitude and Jesus' command over the natural world is highlighted well.

The faith of his disciples was shaken when they mistook their leader for a ghost. Jewish superstition considers ghost sightings at night as signs for people getting harmed in some way. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark talk of a prevailing wind which had made the boat buffet from the shore. Matthew 14: 25 mentions an important fact, "And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea".[21] The 'fourth watch of the night'[22] refers to a specific time. The Romans had divided the night into four parts for time estimation of the hours. According to the story, the incident of Jesus walking on water occurs between three at night and six in the morning. Tradition and modern parapsychology often talk of this particular period when the human subconscious mind is most active and is perceptive to senses hardly felt during the physical activities of any other time of the day. In the Christian tradition, however, the hour between three and four at night was the devil's witching hour when the negative energy was at its peak. Christ's act is, therefore, seen as a defiance to the negative supernatural associations of the fourth watch of the night.

The walking of his disciple Peter on water (after Peter asks for Christ to allow him) and almost sinking (when the wind became boisterous), only to be saved by Jesus again highlights the theme of faith. The disbelief and questioning of the human witnesses clearly mark the episode as unearthly and mystical.

The Gospel of Mark mentions that the disciples' hearts were hardened after this incident since they did not understand or consider the miracle of the loaves.[23] The theme of the supernal power is previously encountered—the similar hardening of heart is spoken of in Exodus, where, due to the intervention of God through the plagues in Egypt, the Pharaoh's heart was hardened (Exodus 7:3)[24] pointing out the majestic omnipotent power, perhaps showing the disciples to be similar to those who questioned Christ's Miracles.

Another Miracle connected to the same theme was that of Jesus calming the storm. Here again, we come across the wondrous demonstration by Jesus over the natural order. The story produces the miracle as the natural expression of Christ's divinity. Reverend A.T. Robertson[25] too speaks of the spirit world being a part of his Human Nature, often merging into a single operation, resulting in a transcendental layer in his existence as the son of God—harping on the chord of supernatural strings as narrated in the Bible.

The Miracles of Healing are some of the most intriguing and well-known works of Christ which are associated with his inherent qualities. The healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the issue of blood stand out as extraordinary mentions. Although they are narrated mostly in an overlapping fashion, the theme of faith again plays a major role, showing compassion and Providence through inexplicable actions.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke talk about a woman suffering from excessive hemorrhage and bleeding for twelve years. She had touched the hem of Jesus' garment (a cloak) when he was in a crowd and was immediately healed. In the Old Testament there are certain rules which the Jews would have to follow.[26] One of them is about the spiritual uncleanliness and impurity of a woman's bleeding and what must be followed, so as to cause no harm in the community. There is a major possibility of the woman's mistreatment by society solely on the basis of these rules. It is quite possible for

her to have come to this Man of Galilee with, as Barclay points out, an inadequate faith, simply to be healed. A strange factor is the flow of power following the touch (since Jesus said that he felt his power leave the body after someone touched him without his knowledge).[27] The touch here strikes as a mystical element since the woman had not touched or felt the physical body of Christ directly. Unlike other Miracles, this took place without any kind of intercession or supplication. Christ's compassionate aura is shown in his addressing of the woman as 'Daughter'[28] despite her action.

Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, too, had come to Jesus with a similar motive, as a last resort, for his daughter of twelve years of age had died some time back. It is known as a healing simply by the fact that Jesus had claimed the girl to be sleeping instead of being dead. Modern scholars have trumpeted this explanation with a contrast to Lazarus' resurrection from death and about the possibility of the girl being in a coma (sleeping) instead of being fully dead. Yet, the girl's immediate response to 'Talitha cumi'[29] is similar to the immediate healing of the woman, an indication of the intensity of the instantaneous supernatural powers.

The Miracles of Jesus continue to be connected with different themes, accounts of which are in some texts, and translations vary.[30] Such is the account of the demon possession.[31] A story with typical supernatural entities as considered by the popular culture of the present century, it re-affirms Christ's authority over nature and the spirit world. It shows his human courage and sense of calm while dealing with the possessed man. The scriptures talk of the man as being naked, living in dark and unclean spaces like tombs and mountains. Luke also mentions that the man could not be kept in chains (he broke them free) and was living in the wilderness, because the devil made him do it. The atmosphere in which he was found is a typical setting for evil spirits and negative energy according to the Jewish superstitions. It was said and believed that it would haunt

people after dark (which is why his disciples mistook Christ as a ghost when he was crossing the lake), travellers and children, being most active during the midday and at deserts, tombs and mountainsides. Although the troubled man greets Christ in a tone of slight mockery, the demons' fear was also illustrated when they requested Christ to allow them to be cast into the herd of pigs nearby.[32]

The most astonishing Miracle performed by Jesus is the raising of Lazarus, a precedence to one of the fundamentals of Christian belief, the resurrection of all human life with the second coming of Jesus.[33] Lazarus (whose name meant 'God is my help'[34]) was sick and his sisters, Mary and Martha, had come to Jesus to inform him. Christ was not much worried but said that his sickness was to glorify God, in turn glorifying the Son of God too (himself). The story follows and on reaching the town, it was found that he had been dead for four days and was laid to rest already. This shows Christ's bonding and closeness with the sisters and Lazarus too (Martha had simply informed him of Lazarus' death). A sense of trust and faith among them scrubs the line of any kind of formality or superiority. One of the most famous lines spoken by Christ is evidenced in this story—"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die…"[35]

Towards the latter part of the story, Jesus exhibits the most humane aspect in him, by crying after being moved by the sisters' grief, despite the fact of intercession waiting to happen and Martha's faith being put to test, twice. Similar to the miraculous feeding of the five thousand people, Christ gave thanks for his glory while looking up, for the intention that people may believe him. It is only after his calling out to Lazarus to come forth that the dead was transformed back to living and came out from the tomb. Lazarus being dead for four days and being resurrected to life by Jesus, a human and the son of God, makes it the most unique Miracle performed by Christ, among others. It reflects the power of Christ's ability of creation (as

seen in the feeding of the people), intercession of Providence (Jairus' daughter, raising Lazarus and the feeding miracle), compassion (healing the woman and the wedding feast at Cana), compassion (healing miracles and Lazarus) and as unnatural inferences (the miracles performed in Nature and possession by the evil spirits).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Galilean Man's journey through the spiritual divinity of the Miracles has produced a mystical spectrum. The New Testament shows that the world of the Supernatural is not limited to possessions by evil spirits or mysterious actions, but perhaps is transcendental, where the good and the evil co-exist (one might question why Jesus didn't banish the demons to hell and instead allowed them to enter into animals). Miracles are seen as manifestations of it, rather than as socially ostracized phenomena. Their presence in Christian theology is quite representative and provides for the base of non-pagan, Western superstitious beliefs too. The idea of the supernal power intertwined with the wonder work as Providence stretches out the possibility of its inclusion in this category.

The Miracles of Christ have proved that his existence was both human and divine. The sense of morality portrayed in his ethics and his tender, yet strong character are etched with the moral messages presented in the religion. Christ's phrases of "O thou of little faith",[36] "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole"[37] and "how is it that ye have no faith?"[38] are like affirmations to the actions causing the Miracles, questioning the audience's reception and belief. The Gospel narratives also show a trend in Christ's spiritual and human evolution. The attempt to re-investigate the Miracles has therefore brought home a different take on these selected Miracles not only as expositions of the religion, but also as those of symbolic significance, making a possible connection to the world of the Supernatural realm.

NOTES

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3 Ibid, 1572.
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5 Excerpt from the Introduction, *The Supernatural in Society, Culture, and History,* eds. Dennis Waskul and Mark Eaton (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), 6-9.
6 Waskul and Eaton, *The Supernatural in Society, Culture and History,* 6.
7 Ibid, 6-8.
8 Ibid, 6-8. (A strong distinction is made between the two words, where Supernatural is etymologically considered to be of older usage and refers to events which are above or beyond the natural order of life, while the latter is a relatively modern term, referring to events and psychic abilities failed to be understood in terms of scientific treatment, acting as a violation of the ethical standards.)
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17 Ibid.
18 Some Coptic manuscripts state that Jesus' mother was a friend to the mother of the bridegroom of the wedding feast at Cana, which may also indicate Mary's insistence.
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22 Matthew 14: 25, KJV.
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27 Leviticus 15: 25-27, KJV.
28 Luke 8: 46, "Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me", KJV.
29 Luke 8: 48, KJV.
30 Mark 5: 41, in the Aramaic language, possibly spoken by Christ during the time, KJV.
31 The Gospels of Mark and Luke speak of one man being possessed, but Matthew mentions two men.
32 Luke 8: 26-39, Possession by Legion, KJV.
33 The NIV Study Bible uses the word 'abyss', which may be considered as a place of confinement for evil spirits.
34 Revelation 1: 7, 3: 11, 22: 12, KJV.
35 Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 1992), 81.
36 John 11: 25-26, KJV.
37 Matthew 14: 31, KJV.
38 Mark 5: 34, KJV.
39 Mark 4: 40, KJV.

Locating God in the Time of Epidemic: John Donne's Plague

MADHUBRATA BHATTACHARYYA

In sixteenth-century England, Simon Forman, a magician, healer, and astrologer who had survived an outbreak of plague, would distinguish between the "natural" and the "supernatural" origins of the epidemic. He designated the alignment of the planets as the realm of the former and placed the wrath of God in the latter category.[1]

This differential schema is testimony to the drastically different connotations these terms had for the early modern readership, as opposed to what they would have for a contemporary one. In the former context, no clear binary could be drawn between the two. The concept of the supernatural in early modern times was "suffused with the signs of the divine."[2] However, the world of nature, being God's second book, was also, in a sense, inherently supernatural.[3] The concept of the *supernaturalis*, first appearing in the thirteenth century, implied a boundary between ordinary phenomena and the direct acts of God. A true miracle would be one that contravened the laws of nature in a manner that could only be accomplished by the divine hand that had created these laws.[4]

The phenomenon of plague poses an interesting problem here in that it represents the opposite of the miracle, as an instance of God's intervention in the created world.[5] Forman's belief in supernaturally caused plague as one where natural medicine was rendered useless was, however, not a popular one. Plague was seen as divine will working through natural forces, against which God had sent precautions and medicines for human usage.[6] Science and religion worked together as physical and spiritual remedies to corruption, with the physical being

regarded by both as God's secondary mean. Fatalism was seen as un-Christian and so unacceptable that it could result in imprisonment.[7]

Against this attitudinal background to plague in early modern England, this paper seeks to read the manner in which John Donne engages with the theme of plague. With particular attention to his text, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*,[8] the paper seeks to read Donne as an interesting case study of, and a highly atypical intervention in, the contemporary discourse around plague and its religious significance.

Ernest B. Gilman acknowledges 1625 as a year that saw an outpouring of plague sermons, official orders, medical pamphlets, and plague broadsheets—a year which, for John Donne, is correlated to a transformative personal crisis, occasioned by his own near-fatal illness two years earlier.[9] Another aspect that should be kept in mind while contextualising Donne's work on plague is his position as a convert from Catholicism. In this position, the ambivalences that characterise his consciousness are, in many ways, co-incidental with the ambivalences that characterise the consciousness of post-Reformation England. Donne's contemporary religious milieu was one where plague had emerged as a site of discursive conquest—one for the establishment of a correct, reformed theological position.

The discourse of plague in post-Reformation Europe, then, has to be understood through the early modern registration of plague itself in highly textual terms, by which it was a form of divine utterance. The textualisation of plague in Reformation culture was carried out against the disappearance of the pictorial regime of the Catholic setup, which had for so long enabled the therapeutic interventions of the plague saints to be represented. The result was an unmediated theology that had to confront plague as an infliction of God's Word.[10]

The motif in Donne's plague writing that Gilman sets apart for investigation is the function of translation—a highly textual function. Kathleen Hines reads the textualisation of plague against

the interpretative framework of religion, which provides a well-defined, familiar body of language upon which the proper terms of the plague are grafted.[11] Against this reading, Donne's re-imagining of disease through metaphor in the sacred and symbolic order of language makes it one possible to confront. Gilman also sees Donne's integration of plague into larger human experience as an exercise that relieves it of its traumatic connotations.

Just as the post-Reformation theological universe Donne inhabits is a diminished one, it is one that is influenced by a reformation of healing. Natural medicine is prioritised to older, more alchemic methods of spiritual cure, with the latter inviting suspicion for their Catholic connotations.[12] Thus, physicians appear as fixtures in Donne's landscape of illness in *Devotions* rather than as entities whose existence calls for justification or negation through debate. The necessity of physicians and, by extension, that of the institution of medical practice are factors incidental to Donne's exercise.

As opposed to other plague writings, the treatment of plague in Donne's *Devotions* is integrated into a larger discourse of sickness and death, with pestilential disease emerging only as a specific type of disease. Donne's treatment of the figure of the physician reflects his own engagement with the contemporary culture of sickness and medicine, and the complexity of understanding it in theological terms. So, while the physician's fear is seen as a limit to human agency, and man's dependence on him as a limitation upon human nature, the former is also understood as a spiritual example for emulation. In Donne's writing, the human presence emerges with the subtextual isolation that plague entails. This loss of community is also one that is playing out in Donne's contemporary theological milieu with the disappearance of the plague saints, until they survive only in the symbolic realm. The Elizabeth Drudy memorialised in the Anniversary poems is a shadowy survivor of the plague saints.[13] Similarly, Donne's physicians retain an intermediary function and

ultimately point to Christ. The physicians are also testimony to the need for community that human beings are deprived of when an outbreak of plague hits. This need for community is ultimately resolved in the uniting of the martyrs and the saints in the figure of God, as the dictates of Reformation demand that the spiritual drama of pestilence be played out in psychological terms.

If plague is seen as a violation of nature,[14] Donne enters its discursive space through a tripartite understanding of his own life in terms of a natural, a supernatural, and a preternatural birth. The second refers to his entry into the Church and is in keeping with his understanding of religion, in his *Anatomy of the World,* as supernatural fruit. The third, in referring to his recuperation from illness, highlights the spiritual framework through which he is already seeing all disease. This is befitting of a man of religion, but it also characterised medicine at large in the late medieval and early modern contexts, where physicians would borrow from religious discourse and even become preachers in their own right.[15]

Donne's integration of the topic of pestilence into his *Devotions* results in a sharp deviation from the prevalent religious rhetoric around plague, by which it is framed as an instrument of the wrath of God. This brought puzzling questions to be grappled with—questions of theodicy as well as those pertaining to individual affliction. Preachers sought to provide explanations as to why plague infected the good, and what succumbing to plague meant as far as it was a reflection of individual dispositions, both spiritual and physical. In this context, spiritual sin came to be tied to physical intemperance. These questions become irrelevant to Donne, as he imposes standardisation upon an individual event[16] to arrive at the question of pestilential disease and ultimately proceed to a meditation upon the human condition. In his 1625 sermon, he will use the plague as an entry point into a discussion of the human condition in relation to sickness and death.[17]

On the one hand, questions of theodicy[18] become irrelevant

when human mortality is attributed to human sin, with God as the mere executioner of death. In addition to this, Donne's exceptional treatment of plague is evinced in his refusal to see it as a state of exception. If anything, it is a testimony to the true frailty of human nature, and an accident to remind us of the hollowness of mortal happiness. In his 1625 sermon, the plague epidemic besetting London is compared to the exodus from Egypt. Plague, then, emerges as something underpinning sacral understandings of human history.

Alongside the aversion to seeing epidemic disease as an extraordinary event[19] that brings with it questions of divine wrath incurred by specific sins, Donne's meditations on plague are also characterised by his refusal to see it as an unmitigated evil. If plague, alongside all depletion of human health, is for Donne a symptom of universal corruption,[20] it is also, in its relation to death, a reminder of the linkage of mortal death to immortal life. In extending the idea of sickness as visitation—already the stuff of prayer books[21]—to the plague that was almost universally read as divine wrath, Donne can "produce life out of death,"[22] reading both his own disease and the ensuing epidemic as ultimately therapeutic events.

As Donne invokes sacred history to naturalise plague and relate it to human nature, he severely undermines the popular view of plague as punishment for sins that could be "identified and rooted out."[23] Rather, as he reminds the reader in *Devotions*, curing the root of disease is up to God alone.

Donne's single-minded emphasis on the inevitability of death is disruptive to a specific post-Reformation context, where the development of modern religion and modern medicine are closely, though not unproblematically, intertwined. Acknowledging the "physician's necessary deceit and its futility,"[24] Donne undermines a cure-oriented approach to plague, as Death is seen as just as much, if not more of, a physic. However, as already discussed, the medical order is not so much negated for its limitations as integrated into a

symbolic order so as to be transcended. The pragmatics of dealing with affliction does not concern Donne so much as the integral role death plays in human life and, ultimately, salvation. At the same time, Donne's spiritualisation of disease undermines any easy binary that can be drawn between the spiritual and the physical. Donne's preoccupation with the Incarnation and the Crucifixion means an intense awareness of the frailty of human physicality as part of Christ's experience on Earth. Ultimately, suffering and death hold the potential of liberating us by tying us closer to Christ. At the same time, Donne's preoccupation with bodily resurrection means an apprehension of spiritual liberation in highly physical terms. Donne's work, even in its exceptionality, is thus a testimony to the ways in which plague and medicine lie at the heart of Reformation history. He also signals a moment in post-Reformation England where the psycho-spiritual drama of liberation is not divorced entirely from concerns of the body.

As the world grapples with a pandemic today, we are forced to re-assess our worldviews at a fundamental level. Science and religion have emerged in positions of both contestation and cooperation. Against this backdrop, plague historiography plays an important role as a reminder of the connected history of the "supernatural" and the "scientific," which we understand as de-linked entities today. Donne's work is important as a reminder of the multiplicity of interpretive frameworks and the possibility of understanding them beyond a simplistic position of mutual antagonism.

In *Plague Writing in Early Modern England,* Gilman eerily apprehends the possibility of subsequent epidemics that might threaten to cast his time of writing as an "anomalous blip in the history of epidemic disease." The current pandemic is indeed forcing us to "reimagine our connection to the rest of the human community, including historical communities such as that of Donne and Jonson," as well as to the "microbial community" at large.[25] Today, we are

indeed, as Gilman predicted, at a juncture in history where the bounded proprietary subject of the liberal imagination is facing violation by microbial incursion.[26] In such a situation, Donne's reflections remain significant, perhaps most strikingly for the manner in which they shed insight upon the human condition.

Even as a contemporary, largely secular readership may, for the most part, fail to identify with Donne's specific hope of resurrection and liberation, it remains important to us. Our hope for turning the pandemic to recuperative ends may lie in the manner in which it provides glimpses into the commonality of human experience. Epidemic disease thus continues to retain the possibility of shedding insight into a universally shared human condition that transcends spatio-temporal boundaries in an increasingly fragmented world. Paradoxically, in Donne's understanding, this human condition is one that can be grasped by grasping the human state, and the human community at large, as a lapsed and limited one.

NOTES

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23 Slack, "Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe," 436.
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"Something was creeping and creeping": An Interview with S. T. Joshi on Lovecraft's Craft, the Weird and the Bizarre

There are few writers as eerily fascinating in their renditions of the phantasmagoric as H. P. Lovecraft. As this year's theme for *Critical Imprints* is the Supernatural, who better than S. T. Joshi to steer us effortlessly into this spectral realm that beckons exploration? A renowned writer and an unquestionable expert on Lovecraft, S. T. Joshi has dedicated many years of his life, time, and research to studying this strange writer and his weird fiction.

Apart from Lovecraft, S. T. Joshi specialises in fantastical and supernatural fiction on a broader spectrum. He has also provided noteworthy criticism on modern writers such as Stephen King.

Luckily for us, S. T. Joshi's brilliance does not deter him from engaging with enthusiastic audiences. Even in the harsh circumstances of the pandemic, he generously agreed to take time off his schedule in order to respond to a prepared interview questionnaire on H. P. Lovecraft, making this volume of *Critical Imprints* doubly special.

His free spirit and vast knowledge shine through in each answer, only increasing our knowledge of the peculiar genius who said: "Almost nobody dances sober, unless they happen to be insane."

Interviewed by Hemalatha Sridhar

When did you first become acquainted with the works of H. P. Lovecraft? What are some of the reasons why you were so impressed by his writing that you ended up specialising in it? Which of his works is your personal favourite?

I first read Lovecraft when I was about 13. I had become interested

in both mystery fiction and horror fiction (I had a lesser interest in science fiction, but that subsided quickly). I of course read such masters as Edgar Allan Poe and Ambrose Bierce—and then I stumbled upon Lovecraft, who was then (early 1970s) still little-known, although becoming more popular. I was simply overwhelmed by his richly textured prose and by the incredibly original imagination he exhibited in his tales. Fairly soon—while still in high school—I began studying Lovecraft as best I could. There were few resources at the time, but I tried to hunt them down. For many years, my favourite story is the short novel *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931), Lovecraft's extraordinary depiction of alien entities coming from outer space and settling in Antarctica. And yet, this is a difficult work for a beginner to understand; I had tried to read it as a teenager and frankly found it beyond my intellectual capacities! But I read it later and found it exceptionally powerful.

Do you think Lovecraft's literature might be considered dated today? If not, why would the millennial readership take to this fascinating yet obscure writer's fiction?

Lovecraft's fiction is the very opposite of being dated. This is because he actually neglects (by design) to discuss such mundane features of daily life as money, human relations, class distinctions, and so on. So his work is easier to understand than that of the "social realists" of his day (e.g., Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, etc.). Lovecraft was single-mindedly focused on the weird: he believed that "phenomena" were the true "characters" in his stories, not the human figures who populate them. And because Lovecraft so frequently emphasises the fragility of human existence in the midst of the immense realms of space and time, this message carries even more resonance today than in his own time: we are all too aware how tenuous is our existence on this planet, and how such forces as climate change, nuclear holocaust, and other things could bring that existence to an end.

In most of the stories of Lovecraft that I have read so far, the author frequently warns readers that man is better off not pursuing the unknown cosmic horrors beyond his ken, because there is no way to come back unscathed from them. Yet, this threshold is almost always crossed. What, then, do you think Lovecraft indicates about human nature?

Lovecraft's frequent claim that the terrors his characters are facing are "unnamable" or "not to be described" was something of a rhetorical device: he usually sets about describing those very terrors to the best of his ability! What Lovecraft is stressing is that his "monsters" are very different from the standard ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and witches of previous weird fiction. His creations are profoundly original and stem from a thorough grasp of philosophy (Lovecraft was a forthright atheist), science, and psychology. He was always doubtful of our ability to endure the chilling reality of our own insignificance in the universe.

The writer's fantastical tales seem to possess a recurring motif of mental degeneration due to horrific experiences. How would you associate Lovecraft with mental health issues, a subject of vital importance today? Did the writer have his own inner demons?

There is no question that Lovecraft had his own mental troubles, and that some of them may have influenced his work. His upbringing was unusual: his father died when he was 8 years old, and his mother was both emotionally distant and at times overprotective. I believe Lovecraft was emotionally stunted by this experience, and that is why his own brief marriage was such a failure. Lovecraft was also in constant poverty, and that must have had some effect on his temperament. But he was also supremely rational and intellectual, and his quest for knowledge acted as a sort of counterweight to his own personal difficulties.

Lovecraft is fairly unfamiliar in India. Can you tell us something

about how he came to write such quaint yet spine-chilling tales? Did his personal experiences provide him with the impetus to do so?

This question would take many pages to answer! Let us start with a comment by Lovecraft himself in a letter: "I should describe mine own nature as tripartite, my interests consisting of three parallel and dissociated groups—(a) Love of the strange and the fantastic. (b) Love of the abstract truth and of scientific logick. (c) Love of the ancient and the permanent. Sundry combinations of these three strains will probably account for all my odd tastes and eccentricities." This is a highly accurate summary of his temperament. Because Lovecraft spent almost his entire life in New England (the oldest settled part of the United States), he came to love that region and set many of his tales there, describing the landscape with meticulous care. His devotion to science (chiefly chemistry and astronomy) led him to create a fusion of weird fiction and science fiction, especially in such tales as "The Colour out of Space" and *At the Mountains of Madness.* His tales are filled with all manner of autobiographical hints and references, and sometimes his friends and colleagues make appearances under different names.

I have encountered references to Lovecraft in plenty of American cinema and television. Does he still have an active fan club in the United States?

Lovecraft's popularity in the United States and the world continues to increase exponentially. When I first became interested in him, in the 1970s, his work was just on the verge of becoming popular through paperback editions. Now he has appeared in all manner of different media—films, television, comic books, video games, role-playing games, etc. etc.—and he has also attained critical acclaim as a pioneering writer in his field. The volume of his *Tales* (2005) that was published by the Library of America was an acknowledgement of his canonical status in American literature. And his work has

now been translated into more than 30 languages, from Russian to Chinese to Serbo-Croatian to Estonian. (I am not certain about Arabic translations, but I suspect there are some.) I see no end to Lovecraft's increasing celebrity.

"The Call of Cthulhu" begins with a quotation which contains the phrase "forms of which poetry and legend alone have caught a flying memory and called them gods, monsters, mythical beings of all sorts and kinds…" What do you think Lovecraft is saying about the role of the artist here? Did this apply to his artistry as well?

Lovecraft had a high regard for the role of the artist in human civilisation. He believed that artists must be sincere above all things—and that they must not cater to a given audience or be concerned about the monetary benefits accruing from the sale of their work. This was a bold and noble stance, and resulted in personal suffering (he refused to alter a work merely to generate a sale in the crude "pulp magazines" of the day) but also in the endurance of his work well beyond that of his contemporaries. Writers of weird fiction occupy a special place of their own. He once wrote: "The imaginative writer devotes himself to art in its most essential sense… He is a painter of moods and mind-pictures—a capturer and amplifier of elusive dreams and fancies—a voyager into those unheard-of lands which are glimpsed through the veil of actuality but rarely, and only by the most sensitive. He is one who not only sees objects, but follows up all the bizarre trails of associated ideas which encompass and lead away from them. He is the poet of twilight visions and childhood memories, but sings only for the sensitive."

With a penchant for creating dark, murky backdrops alongside events triggering abject terror and psychological degradation, do Lovecraft's works at times seem formulaic?

It is remarkable how many variations Lovecraft is able to generate

on a relatively small number of basic plot ideas. It can be seen that several of his earlier tales were rewritten in later years, with the result that the ideas were vastly expanded and made more profound. On occasion one finds Lovecraft falling back on some of the formulas he had created, but these stories form a minority in his overall output.

We see no instances of hope or redemption in his macabre tales. What was Lovecraft's opinion of the human condition? What might have caused it to be that way?

One cannot interpret the "philosophy" or psychology in his fiction simplistically as exactly mirroring Lovecraft's own attitudes. He is, after all, writing weird fiction, whose purpose is to terrify. In that sense, he is writing about issues that terrify him personally, rather than expressing his own beliefs in a straightforward manner. Lovecraft did believe that human beings were ultimately insignificant in the vast cosmos-at-large, and much of his fiction is intended to stress this point. He also believed that human civilisation would eventually collapse, and that other entities would take over the earth. But these were largely abstract concerns. He was, in his personal life, passionately devoted to the preservation of his society (and especially the physical tokens of the past, whose continued existence gave people a sense of being part of an historical continuum), and toward the end of his life he became a moderate socialist who hoped that society and government could be refashioned to help all citizens, not just the wealthy. Even so, I think it is safe to say that Lovecraft did not have much faith that such a reformation of society would occur.

How were Lovecraft's works different from those of his contemporaries? Do you hold any of these contemporaries in high esteem as well?

Although Lovecraft was strongly influenced by such of his predecessors and contemporaries as Edgar Allan Poe, Lord Dunsany, Arthur Machen, and Algernon Blackwood, he evolved a highly original

outlook that he called "cosmicism," where the immensities of space and time were at the forefront. This outlook was, he knew, very rare in fiction, and it became his signature achievement. He also had a large group of friends, colleagues, and correspondents with whom he kept in close touch. (He may have written as many as 80,000 letters in his lifetime; about 5000 survive, coming to about 4.5 million words.) Such of his associates as Frank Belknap Long, Donald Wandrei, Robert E. Howard, and Robert Bloch have attained celebrity in their own right, and much of their work is of considerable interest. August Derleth claimed to be Lovecraft's chief disciple (he also became his first publisher), but his weird work is on the whole mediocre and unoriginal.

What is your opinion on the scenario of supernatural fiction today?

We have, for the past several decades, been in the midst of a tremendous resurgence of weird fiction. There was a brief time—roughly the 1970s and 1980s—when horror fiction was a bestselling phenomenon, with the work of such writers as Stephen King, Peter Straub, Clive Barker, and Anne Rice. But their work is on the whole quite inferior to genuine weird artists such as Ramsey Campbell, T. E. D. Klein, Thomas Ligotti, and Caitlín R. Kiernan. Most weird fiction today is published in the "small press," and there is a great deal of fine work being written. These writers are generally not concerned about writing "best-sellers," but are instead approaching their work in the same manner as Lovecraft: they are concerned about sincere "self-expression," seeking to convey their personal visions in as artistic a manner as possible.

According to you, what is the impact that Lovecraft has had upon modern writers who specialise in the Uncanny? Have you noticed any writer who bears a similarity with Lovecraft's style or technique?

Lovecraft has had an immense impact upon weird writing today. Some writers have chosen to imitate Lovecraft directly, writing blatant pastiches of his work. (I have chronicled this material in my book *The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos* [2015].) But other writers—such as Caitlín R. Kiernan, Jonathan Thomas, Lois H. Gresh, Donald Tyson, and many others—have used Lovecraft's ideas as simply a springboard for the expression of their own ideas and conceptions. These writers have done fine work without being in any way obviously imitative of Lovecraft.

Are you acquainted with the works of any Indian writers of the supernatural? Have you read them in translation or in the original?

I'm sorry to say that I have not read a single Indian writer of the supernatural! I imagine much good work has been done by such writers, and I would be interested in reading them. I would have to read them in English, as I can no longer read or speak my native language of Marathi.

What are the other genres and writers that are close to your heart?

In college I actually read extensively in Latin and Greek literature and also in ancient history and philosophy—but I cannot pursue that kind of work now, as it requires a high degree of specialisation. I have always been interested in literary satire—from Juvenal to Jonathan Swift to Ambrose Bierce to H. L. Mencken to Nathanael West and Gore Vidal. And I just wrote a book about the detective/crime story, *Varieties of Crime Fiction*. That genre has always been dear to me, although I recognise that it does not have the aesthetic range of many other genres.

Do you have any future academic projects lined up? Do you plan to continue with your research on Lovecraft or branch out?

Lovecraft himself has led me to branch out into other authors and other areas of literature and thought. I have done a great deal of work on such of his own influences as Ambrose Bierce and Lord Dunsany. And Lovecraft's bracing atheism has led me to speak out on the subject myself and to write and compile several books about atheism. My main current project is the preparation of Lovecraft's complete surviving correspondence for publication—in an estimated 25 volumes. Already, about 15 volumes have been published, and several others are close to being ready to appear. I am also publishing many volumes of the essays and journalism of H. L. Mencken.

Has the pandemic affected your academic schedule adversely? Do you see yourself actively participating more in webinars now? If so, would you be interested in attending one happening in India? Because I have been working as a "freelance" writer from home since about 1995, my daily life has not been substantially affected by the pandemic. I am happy to work at home, surrounded by my books, papers, and other paraphernalia assembled over a lifetime of research. And with so much material now available online, I do not have to venture to libraries (which remain closed here) very often for research purposes. So I would certainly be interested in attending a webinar in India!

Have you ever thought of teaching creative writing techniques to aspiring writers of the supernatural? Any nuggets of wisdom for young writers in India who wish to dabble in this genre? Although I have never taught at a university, I have actually helped a great many novice writers privately. They have sought me out and sent me their stories, and I have tried to advise them and also tried to get them published if their work is of sufficient quality. Among my chief "disciples" are Jonathan Thomas, Michael Aronovitz, and Curtis M. Lawson. If I have any advice to offer, it is that one read the best work of this genre, both old and new, before attempting to

write in it. It always helps to know the history of your field before you attempt to make your own contribution to it. Weird fiction offers tremendous possibilities for literary expression, and one must not be concerned about trying to make a lot of money or pleasing a wide audience. Let us recall what Lovecraft said: "The opinions of the masses are of no interest to me, for praise can truly gratify only when it comes from a mind sharing the author's perspective. There are probably seven persons, in all, who really like my work; and they are enough. I should write even if I were the only patient reader, for my aim is merely self-expression."

Contributors

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