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EDITORIAL

LORNA PIATTI-FARNELL

Auckland University of Technology

and

ASHLEIGH PROSSER

The University of Western Australia

Re-Thinking Gothic Narratives

Whenever the terms in which the Gothic manifests are under scrutiny, it is not uncommon to hear questions over the importance of narrative. More specifically, the very meaning, structure, and foundations of the 'Gothic narrative' are often the topic of discussion. In recent years, a desire to identify the parameters that define and re-iterate the boundaries of the Gothic narrative have increasingly gained more prominence (Groom 2012). As the Gothic often likes to shift and challenge boundaries, it goes without saying that these discussions are frequently confronting, and definitions are difficult to pin down. This is especially true within our multi-media-focused contemporary world, where the Gothic regularly finds fertile ground in spaces that like to challenge the very notion of narrative, and its development.

Concomitantly, a distinct interest in how the Gothic narrative – so called – engages with pre-existing and constantly developing tales of history, folklore, and cultural spectres is critically noticeable. Recent texts such as Emma McAvoy's *Gothic Tourism* (2016), Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Maria Beville's *The Gothic and the Everyday: Living Gothic* (2014), and L. Andrew Cooper's *Gothic Realities* (2010) have explored the intersections between fictional narratives and cultural narratives, showing that, when it comes to the Gothic, the boundary between the two grows increasingly thinner. It is therefore necessary to continuously question and re-think the notion of 'Gothic narratives', not only in terms of how they develop, but also to what extent they owe a debt to cultural and historical tales of hauntings, spectres, and horror.

It is within this critical space that this issue of *Aeternum* sites itself. The scholarship of the authors collectively present an intriguing argument for what it means to write, and to read, a 'Gothic narrative'. Each of the articles consider the origins, the inspiration, or the motivations that underlie the chosen narratives, in order to address the powerful place that such stories can have within our contemporary, ever-changing world. The first two articles of this issue – by J. S. Mackley and Matthew Thompson, respectively – are about the enduring historical legacy of nineteenth-century London's infamous 'Jacks': Spring-heeled Jack and Jack the Ripper. Mackley explores the mysterious legend of Spring-heeled Jack, an unknown figure who apparently terrorised London from 1837 to 1904, and whose acts gave rise to popular "Penny Dreadful" serial stories published for decades to follow, while Thompson addresses the endurance of the Ripper narrative in contemporary Britain and the insensitive sensationalism of the Ripper's victims as a grotesque centrepiece for museum exhibits and tourist destinations. In the third article of the issue, Sarah Brown further draws our attention to what inspires the creation of a Gothic narrative with a discussion of the literary influences from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic novels in particular that can be found within Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Joanne Watkiss is similarly concerned with the question of motivation that belies the construction of a Gothic tale in the penultimate article of the issue, which examines the narratives created by the traumatised psyche of Briony Tallis, the haunted author-protagonist of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. We return to idea of the historical legacy of Gothic narratives in the final article, in which Kerry Dean Carso explores how the popular tourist destination colloquially named "Cooper's Cave", the ancient cave in the Hudson River in Glens Falls, New York that inspired James Fenimore Cooper to write *The Last of the Mohicans* in 1824, has endured as a site that is exemplary of Gothic Tourism.

Finally, this issue concludes with a book review for Francesca Saggini's *The Gothic Novel and the Stage: Romantic Appropriations*, written by Blair Speakman. Published in 2015, Saggini's study examines the concept of 'stage appropriation' in the Romantic period and the relationship that it fostered between the late eighteenth-century Gothic novel and the theatre. Saggini's key case studies include the dramatic depiction of the supernatural by the famous novelist Matthew Lewis, who is

renowned for his Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), but lesser known for his work as a Gothic dramatist, and the play *Fontainville Forest* (1794) by James Boaden, which is a stage adaptation of Ann Radcliffe's novel *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). The review is an apt way to conclude an issue of *Aeternum* so preoccupied with the nature of Gothic narratives, for Saggini's book draws attention to precisely the questions that have been raised by the articles concerning the many and varied ways in which the Gothic can tell us its tales.

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Editors' Details

Dr Lorna Piatti-Farnell is Director of the Popular Culture Research Centre at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. She is the President and Founder of the Gothic Association of New Zealand and Australia (GANZA,) and Chair for Gothic and Horror for the Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand (PopCAANZ). Her research interests lie at the intersection of contemporary popular media and cultural history, with a focus on Gothic and Food Studies.

E-mail: lorna.piatti-farnell@aut.ac.nz

Ashleigh Prosser is a PhD Candidate in English and Cultural Studies at The University of Western Australia. Her doctoral thesis is a study of the Gothic in the London-based works of contemporary British author and historian Peter Ackroyd. Ashleigh's research interests lie with the Gothic and its relationship to haunting and the uncanny. Ashleigh is the current Postgraduate Representative for the Gothic Association of New Zealand and Australia (GANZA).

E-mail: ashleigh.prosser@research.uwa.edu.au

J. S. MACKLEY
University of Northampton

Spring-heeled Jack: The Terror of London

ABSTRACT

The legends of Spring-heeled Jack circulated after a series of assaults against young women reported in 1837; the descriptions of the assailant were of a “devil-like gentleman” or a “leaping man”. Who he was, no one knew, and although the sightings were generally documented around the London area, there were reports from all over the country until 1904. Some of these were fuelled by superstition and copy-cat attacks, others were exaggerated sightings where it was claimed that people were frightened to death. These reports gave rise to stories published as serials in the “Penny Dreadful” newspapers, beginning in 1863. Some stories used Spring-heeled Jack as a mysterious character, others focused on him as an aristocratic who enjoyed pranking people – especially those who abused their status – but who was ultimately a champion for the weak, the vulnerable and the exploited.

Keywords: Spring-heeled Jack Terror of London, Penny Dreadful, Victorian Gothic, Gothic London, serial novel

The nineteenth century saw an unprecedented increase in the experimental genre of Gothic literature exploring the “gloomth” that was epitomised by some London districts and society. While readers’ appetites for the macabre were being satisfied by the supernatural writings of authors such as Horace Walpole and Matthew Lewis, others sought the sensibility of the descriptions of exotic landscapes as depicted in works by authors such as Ann Radcliffe and Eleanor Sleath. However, in 1837 there emerged a character on the streets and open spaces in and around London who established a reputation for terrifying pranks and assaults on women. Victorian Society quickly put a name to their fears of this phantom attacker: Spring-heeled Jack. Reports of incidents involving Jack continued around England for sixty-

seven years. The labyrinthine and claustrophobic streets, thick with London fog and shadows cast by gas streetlamps made the perfect gothic setting for Jack's antics and became the subject of plays and serial novels in the infamous "Penny Dreadful" newspapers, published weekly by the Newsagents Publishing Company and in *The Boy's Standard*, priced at one penny (Kirkpatrick 2013, 13).

This study will principally focus on the reported sightings of Spring-heeled Jack between 1837 and 1904, and will also look at some of the printed "Penny Dreadful" series to show how the story, and the character, of Spring-heeled Jack develops. Although Jack himself is described as "the Terror of London", these stories are described as a "Romance of the nineteenth Century". It is acknowledged on the front cover that "a person known to the police as Spring-heeled Jack did frighten and cause the death of several persons" but, according to the publicity on the back cover, this Jack is a "wonderful man" who undertakes "daring deeds and startling adventures" to defend the weak and helpless (SHJ 1863 [repr. 1867]). This is the major difference between these historical and fictional reports: the historical entity terrorised the community, whereas the fictional Jack, particularly in the 1863 story, acknowledged his past transgressions and acted, as Punter and Byron describe it, to "police the boundaries of the human, pointing to those lines that must not be crossed" (Punter and Byron 2004, 263). He uses his monstrous disguise of Spring-heeled Jack to identify the hypocrites of aristocratic society, and to stop their abuse of power.

The study of Spring-heeled Jack sighting is rife with difficulties: when we interrogate sources, we find that some authors have written fictions, but that these fictions have been incorporated into the canon of Spring-heeled Jack incidents. Other authors have used fact and fiction interchangeably and their works are the foundation for later writers. Even the so-called facts of those contemporary newspaper reports may have been exaggerated or influenced by oral tales and urban legends already circulating. Some stories have vivid illustrations, when the truth is far less dramatic.

Although there were reports of apparitions and of a "peculiar leaping man" as early as 1817, these were extensions of sightings of London ghosts. The gothic atmosphere of the London fog and pockets of light from gas lamps gave pranksters a place to hide and vanish, and provide a place where witnesses' imaginations could create demons in the darkness. Generally, the reported sightings demonstrate Jack's intention to distress vulnerable women: in 1826 there is a newspaper account in *The Northampton Mercury* (21st January 1826) of a "person nightly appearing in a mask" in Southampton who "has been fired at without effect, being enveloped in steel armour; he also wears a pair of spring boots which enable him to vault over a ten-foot wall". Jack played upon his supernatural reputation, as Botting observes: "Imagined supernatural terrors are accompanied by other mysteries that lie closer to home and reality" (Botting 1996, 64). Jack's apparent supernatural powers led to overwrought emotions. Modern discussions of historical events also include the

story of Polly Adams, a tavern worker from Blackheath, who, on the 11th October 1837, was attacked by a “devil-like gentleman” at Blackheath Fair who tore off her blouse and scratched her stomach with his claws before escaping by leaping over a fence (Haining 1977, 1–9).

Also in October 1837, Mary Stevens, a domestic servant, was walking across Clapham Common when she was set upon by a figure who leapt out from an alleyway and proceeded to rip at her clothes and touch her body with cold claws. When Stevens screamed, several residents came to her aid, but the attacker was nowhere to be found. On the following day, a figure leapt in front of a carriage causing the driver to lose control and crash. Witnesses describe how the assailant escaped by jumping over a nine-foot wall, surrounded by echoing, maniacal laughter. Shortly after this incident, Jack left footprints, three inches deep, in the ground near Clapham Church when he assaulted a woman. These impressions appeared to show a spring mechanism which gave him his ability to jump. The incidents involving Mary Stevens, the carriage, and the Clapham footprints are discussed by Elizabeth Villiers (Villiers 1928, 240–45; cf. Haining 1977, 39), however, these incidents are not documented in any contemporary sources.

These urban myths circulated among the populace. Botting argues that the “gloom and darkness” of Gothic literature more generally, but equally a part of the locale where sightings of Jack were reported, became “external markers of inner and emotional states” (Botting 1996, 91–2). These stories did not distance the horror in an exotic land, or a different historical milieu, instead, they were placed in the locality of the reader (Punter and Byron 2004, 26). In December 1837, there was an account of a businessman who had reported that he had seen a “leaping man” on Barnes Common, although when the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Herald* sent someone to investigate the stories:

he was directed to many persons who were named as having been injured by this alleged ghost, but, on his speaking to them, they immediately denied all knowledge of it, but directed him to other persons whom they had heard, had been ill-treated, but with them he met with no better success; and the police [...] declare that, although they have made every inquiry into the matter, they cannot find one individual hardy enough to assert a personal knowledge on the subject (*The Morning Herald*, 10th January 1838).

On the day before New Year’s Eve of 1837, residents of the neighbourhood of Lewisham described a figure disguised in a bear skin and wearing spring shoes who “jumps to and fro before foot passengers” as part of a wager to appear as these “freaks [...] in nine different parishes”, according to *The Northampton Mercury* (30th December 1837). The figure was now named “Steel Jack” (presumably from earlier sightings when he was seen wearing armour) and then on 13th January 1838 an article carried the headline “Spring Jack” and it was very soon afterwards, on the

22nd February, that the Press gave a name to their fears: Spring-heeled Jack (reported in the *West Kent Guardian*, on the 13th January 1838, and *The Times*, on the 22nd February 1838).

The antics of this mysterious character must have been the talk of the town: on January 8th, a representation was made to Sir John Cowan, the Lord Mayor of London, signed by "A resident of Peckham". Cowan spoke about this at a public session held the following day in the Mansion House – the Lord Mayor's official residence. The representation claimed that "some individuals (of, as the writer believes, the higher ranks of life) have laid a wager with a mischievous and foolhardy companion (name as yet unknown), that he dares not take on himself the task of visiting many of the villages near London in three disguises, a ghost, a bear and a devil" (as described in *The Times*, on the 9th January 1838) or alternatively he was "a ghost [...] attired in polished steel armour". (*The Morning Herald*, 10th January 1838). The British Library catalogue references a pamphlet, assumed to have been circulated in 1838, describing "The Apprehension and examination of Spring-Heel'd Jack who has appeared as a Ghost, Demon, Bear, Baboon, etc.", however this pamphlet, along with two others relating to Spring-Heeled Jack, was destroyed when the British Museum was damaged during the London Blitz, 10–11th May 1941. Jack was often perceived as the devil incarnate, so, for a society that was undergoing a massive social upheaval because of scientific advances, Jack acted as an anchor to remind the readers about their Christian faith and superstition (Killeen 2009, 127). The hysteria that followed Jack may have developed from anxieties which Robert Miles refers to as a "Gothic cusp" which describes the populous who were facing a new year with the young new queen, Victoria, on the throne, and the uncertainties of the anticipated social upheaval of the times (Miles 1995, 5).

The complaint by the resident of Peckham was followed up by the *Morning Chronicle* with a summary of some of the alarming incidents that had apparently occurred in the villages around London. Residents from Peckham were frightened by "the alleged pranks of the ghost, imp or devil". The Barnes attacks were carried out by a figure "in the shape of a large white bull", but he appeared as a white bear in East Sheen, and in Richmond there were reports of "females being frightened to death and children torn to pieces by the supposed unearthly visitant". In Ham and Petersham, he appeared as a devilish imp where "neither man, woman, nor child durst venture beyond the threshold of their domiciles without a lantern and a thick club stick"; afterwards "an unearthly warrior, clad in armour of polished brass, with spring shoes, and large claw gloves" was seen in Hampton Wick and Hampton Court. In Bushy Park, Teddington, Twickenham, Whitton, and Hounslow he was seen to frighten children and adolescents as well as leaping over the high walls. In Cutthroat Lane in Isleworth, a carpenter named Jones was assaulted by the "ghost" wearing steel armour and bright red shoes. When the carpenter fought back, the ghost was joined by two others who shredded his clothes as they fought. His antics are recorded in Heston, Drayton, Harlington, and Uxbridge. He was seen wearing armour in Hanwell, Brentford, Ealing, Acton, Hammersmith and Kensington. In

Ealing he injured a blacksmith by tearing his flesh with iron claws, in Hammersmith he attacked a pie-seller, and children reported seeing an “unearthly being dancing by moonlight” on the green in front of Kensington Palace. Furthermore, it was reported that “the wager according to which Spring John plays his pranks, runs that he is to kill six females with fright. Six hundred are nearly dead at the idea of it already” (reported in *West Kent Guardian*, 13th January 1838). Spring-heeled Jack was making the rounds of the London villages, leaving terror (and rumour) in his wake (*All the Year Round*, 9th August 1884, 345–50). Reporting in 1884 on the list of sightings of Jack, the author of an article that appeared in *All the Year Round* declared that “so numerous were the tales told of Spring-heeled Jack that a good many must be supposed to be true; whist on the other hand, great allowance must be made for credulity, some people not being content with the marvellous as they find it, but being only too happy to add thereto” (*All the Year Round*, 9th August 1884, 349).

Some of these reports are simply the product of an overactive imagination: one resident of Old Brentford told a policeman that he had seen the “ghost”, but upon examination it transpired that he had seen a police inspector on his horse! The report continues that in all cases “although the stories were in everybody’s mouth, no person who had actually seen him could be ascertained”. On another occasion, a young domestic servant was terrified as her umbrella was snatched away from her. She fled, believing she had been attacked by Spring-heeled Jack, only to discover the following day that her assailant was, in fact, a mass of overhanging brambles (Golicz 2006, 1). Other stories were considered as “the invention of some wag”, and in some cases, the local constabulary had heard nothing of the figure who was terrorising the streets, and the report concludes “we strongly suspect that the Peckham statement will, on investigation, have a similar result” (*The Morning Chronicle*, 10th January 1838). This form of terror, as advanced by Ann Radcliffe, is constructed from “indirect or direct encounters” with a girl “on the cusp of womanhood, and various terrorists who are located at the crossroads of dread and desire” (Davison 2009, 94). In this instance, however, the perpetrators are constructed from the reports of previous encounters with Jack and are generated within the young lady’s mind, an event with which many women could identify (Davison 2009, 144). This is the “supernatural explained” as seen in texts such as Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Of course, these were not simply “fantasies”, or the desire to engage with the Gothic as seen in *Northanger Abbey*. Davison, citing Woolstonecraft, observes that “the terrors, the restrains, the dangers of the Gothic novel were not the fantasies, but the realities of a woman’s life” (cited in Davison 2009, 148).

Despite this summary, the Lord Mayor received a further representation, this time from Thomas Lott of Bow Lane who observed that “Some individual (‘gentleman’ he has been designated) drives about with a livery servant in a cab, and, throwing off a cloak, appears in these frightful forms, and is to win a wager by the joke” (*The Times*, 10th January 1838). As Cowan received further representations,

vigilante groups were formed – one was apparently led by the Duke of Wellington, even though he was nearly aged seventy at the time (Vyner 1961, 3).¹

Something about these reports of Spring-heeled Jack captured the public imagination. On the 27th January 1838, while the Mansion House Representations were still attracting the public's interest, *Franklin's Miscellany* published a fictionalised story called "The Spring Jack", which was written by "Peter Piper" (Adcock, online). This story is set in a pub on Peckham Rye, perhaps drawing on the existing reports that had been made to the Lord Mayor of London by the anonymous Resident of Peckham. The story is illustrated with a picture of a devilish-faced Jack, wearing boots, a cape, and skin-tight clothes. Five characters have fainted while Jack himself leaps over a house. The narrative describes how his boots "have powerful springs attached thereto, which can be sprung at the pleasure of the wearer". The plot tells of how Jack orders a pot of ale in the local public house, but when it is brought to him, the pewter melts in his fingers. Jack asks for something else to eat, but the landlord refuses. Jack then melts his way into the food cupboard: "placing his fist against the oaken cupboard-door, smoke arose, and screwing his fist about a little, it went through like a red-hot poker, taking and devouring the food and then breaking a pie-dish over the landlord's head". The article concludes that this story must be true because the landlord "has ever since punctually attended the neighbouring church" and since then "he has filled his pots and given good measure" (*Franklin's Miscellany*, vol. 1, no. 7, 27th January 1838). Thus, as well as reaffirming the public's terror of Jack's apparently supernatural abilities, it also acted as a morality tale to be a good Christian and to serve honest measures. Here, then, the "monster serves to demonstrate or warn: "by providing a warning of the results of vice and folly, monsters promote virtuous behaviour" (Punter and Byron 2006, 263).

However, away from the world of fiction and rumour, serious attacks were reported and investigated: on the 22nd February 1838, *The Times* carried the headline "OUTRAGE ON A YOUNG LADY". A complaint was put forward to the Lambeth Street office of the police by Mr John Alsop, "a gentleman of considerable property" who worked in the Bank of England and who lived in an isolated cottage on Bearbind Lane between the villages of Bow and Old Ford. This remote dwelling was thus an ideal spot for an attack. The report described how on the 20th February, Alsop's eighteen-year old daughter, Jane, heard a "violent ringing" at the gate. When she enquired what the matter was, and requested that he would not ring so loud, the figure told Jane that he was a policeman and said, "For God's sake, bring me a light, for we have caught Spring-heeled Jack here in the lane". When Jane returned with a candle, the "policeman" threw off his cloak, then:

¹ The reference to the Duke of Wellington is mentioned in Haining, 1977, 42–44; Mike Dash says there is "no evidence of the Duke of Wellington's involvement in the scare. I suspect it may have been suggested to Haining by discovery of the real involvement of the much less celebrated Admiral Codrington", Mike Dash, pers. comm. (email 1 December 2015).

applying the lighted candle to his breast, presented a most hideous and frightful appearance, and vomited forth a quantity of blue and white flames from his mouth, and his eyes resembled red balls of fire. From the hasty glance which her fright enabled her to get of his person, she observed that he wore a large helmet, and his dress, which appeared to fit him very tight, seemed to her to resemble white oil skin (*The Times*, 22nd February 1838).

She tried to run, but he caught her by the dress and neck then forced her head under his arms and scratched at her dress with claws “which she was certain were of some metallic substance”. Jane screamed and, wrenching herself away from him, she fled to the safety of her house but Jack caught her again. This time he lashed at her dress and neck and tore her combs and a substantial amount of hair from her head before dragging her down the stone steps and away from the house “with considerable violence”. Jane’s younger sister, Mary was frozen with fear, but her elder sister, Mrs Susan Harrison, managed to pull Jane free from Jack’s claws and back into the safety of the house. Even then, Jack persisted at knocking at their door until the women called for the police. Mr Alsop and his wife had been seriously ill with a rheumatic affection over several weeks, but he managed to get out of bed to assist his daughter who had “all appearance of receiving the most personal serious violence”. Alsop also noted that there was an accomplice to this assault as the first attacker did not stop to pick up his cloak as he fled across the fields and therefore there must have been someone else to retrieve it. He offered ten guineas as a reward for the capture of this criminal (*The Times*, 22nd February 1838). Karl Bell points out how the newspapers exaggerated the story as it develops. The earlier reports express surprise that “there must have been some person with him to pick it up”, while the later stories suggest that Jack “had left his cloak behind him which someone else picked up and ran off with”; and Bell concludes that “these shifts [...] were significant in shaping a public sense of who or what Jack was” (Bell 2012, 175).

On Sunday the 25th February, it was reported that “one of the ‘Spring-heeled Jack’ gang” knocked on the door of Mr Ashworth at 2 Turner Street, Commercial Road. The servant boy observed that the visitor had “thrown off his cloak and presented a most hideous appearance”. The boy screamed for help and Jack ran away “unable to accomplish any more mischief” (Reported in *The Morning Herald*, 27th February 1838; cf. Dash 1996, 55; Vyner 1961, 4). The servant claims that the visitor had a claw-like hand and his clothing was adorned with a family crest with the letter W embroidered on his costume – no doubt this was a clue to the villain’s identity.

This “clue” to Jack’s character – suggesting that he can be identified with an aristocrat – brings the legend firmly into the realm of the Gothic: we see the monstrous aristocrat in texts including *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and, of course, the monster as aristocrat in *Dracula*, amongst others. In these case, as Fred Botting argues, “monarchy, courts and inherited wealth” are where “the

metaphor of the monster highlights the barbarity and tyranny of feudal power” (Botting 1996, 93). The different portrayals of Jack as aristocrat will be explored later, most particularly in relation to the 1863 story where his identity is suggested, but never confirmed, and, in addition to playing pranks, Jack uses his status to support the vulnerable, and to expose and punish, the criminal, the bullies, the hypocrite and those who abuse power. It is also seen in the shorter 1878 (origin) story where it addresses (and dismisses) the possibility of Jack being the *alter ego* of the Marquis of Waterford. Instead, Jack has been dispossessed and tries to regain his inheritance. In a time when foreign aristocrats were being replaced in the gothic novel by overambitious or mad scientists, it is curious that Jack is still associated with a class of higher status.

While investigating the complaint presented by Jane Alsop, Mr Hardwick at the Lambeth Street Police-office was presented with the details of another attack. A report printed in *The Morning Post* on the 7th March 1838 reports that on “Wednesday last” (that is, the 28th February) eighteen-year old Lucy Scales and her sister were walking home from visiting her brother, a “respectable” butcher from Narrow Street in the Limehouse area, of East London when she noticed a figure in the shadows of Green Dragon-alley. When she was near to the person “he spurted a quantity of blue flame right in her face”. Blinded, she collapsed and endured several hours of violent fits. Lucy’s description says that she had first thought that the figure, enveloped in a large cloak, was a woman wearing a bonnet or headdress.

Ironically, having read about Spring-heeled Jack in the newspaper that afternoon, Mr Scales the butcher had remarked that it was unlikely that he would attack in Limehouse on account of the number of butchers in that area. Lucy Scales’s sister, who was not attacked, could arguably have given a better description of Lucy’s assailant, however “she was not at home when the officer called”, so Mr Scales reported what his sister had told him: the attacker was “tall, thin, and [of] gentlemanly appearance, enveloped in a large cloak, and carried in front of his person a large lamp, or bulls eye, similar to those in the possession of the police [...] he threw open his cloak, exhibited the lamp, and puffed a quantity of flame from his mouth into the face of her sister”. The sister had noted that the assailant never spoke, and in fact, he left when she fell unconscious. Her condition, “suffering from hysterics and great agitation, in all probability the result of fright,” was confirmed by a local surgeon; the police officer confirmed that it was possible to produce this effect “by blowing through a tube in which spirits of wine, sulphur, and another ingredient were deposited and ignited” (*The Morning Post*, 7th March 1838).

At the Police Office, Hardwick said that he felt that the attacks were committed by one person rather than a group. Furthermore, in the police investigation that followed, it is reported that three men from the John Bull public house in Old Ford heard the cries from the Alsop family and went to help. On their way, they met a tall man wearing a large coat. They were told that a policeman was

needed at Bear-bind Cottage. It was only later that they realised that this was most likely the man who had committed the assaults (Dash 1996, 13).

The Alsops' testimony is the earliest clear description of Jack's appearance. In addition, in almost all other newspaper reports (with exceptions such as the attack on the Isleworth Carpenter), Jack is seen operating on his own: here it is suggested that he was an accomplice (although admittedly Alsop never actually saw him). Jack is also seen to select his victim and lure her out to him, rather than pouncing on her in the street. Finally, the fact that Jane responded to the original call "We have caught Spring-Heeled Jack" suggests how widespread and prevalent the oral stories of Jack were circulating at the time.² On the other hand, the surgeon's report leaves no doubt that Lucy Scales was indeed attacked, and her description of Jack was not due to an overactive imagination triggered by reading about him in the newspapers. However, the principal difference is that Jane Alsop was clawed, dragged and had her hair pulled out, whereas Lucy was left prone, but Jack left without further attack. Other features common to the assault on the two young women are that Jack wears a cloak and some kind of headgear (Alsop describes it as a "helmet", Scales as a "bonnet"). He attacks them with his claws and also vomits blue flames. Curiously, there is no report of these flames burning either of the women, but in the case of Jane Alsop, he needs her to bring a candle before he can produce the flames; with Lucy Scales, he is already carrying a lantern. In addition, on no occasion is he seen to leap which is arguably the principal source of his terror. When we consider the account of Jane Alsop, if he *could* jump, then it should have been so easy for him to leap to the upstairs window to gain access to the property and to silence Jane's sister when she calls the police. It is entirely plausible that the attacker knew the Alsop family and particularly the position held by Jane's father. It is also possible, therefore that Jane also knew her attacker and was the circulating stories of a well-known "terror" to conceal his identity. But what is so terrifying about the Alsops' description is that – at least in a gothic context – the sightings of Spring-heeled Jack meant that the terror was no longer occurring a long time ago in a land far, far away. Instead, the monster was local, he was violent, and anyone might encounter him.

Jack's motivations at this stage are a mystery. His actions are mostly described as "pranks" and "outrages" rather than crimes which are horrific assaults against women; one of the commentators observes that he neither robs nor rapes them. Karl Bell comments on the Victorian justice system, noting that "merely frightening someone, even to the point of mental imbalance, appears to have been treated as an immoral prank by a cowardly man against a defenceless woman" (Bell 2012, 78). So aside from a perverse pleasure of terrorising women, what is the purpose of his attacks? When we consider the Jane Alsop testimony, he succeeds in

² As mentioned earlier, there were three documents presumed to have been dated 1838 which were destroyed in the London Blitz, the other two were catalogued as "Authentic particulars of the awful appearance of Spring-heeled Jack; together with his extraordinary life etc." and "The surprising exploits of Spring-heel Jack in the vicinity of London etc." suggesting that the rumours were broadly circulated.

frightening her and causing her physical pain by lashing her with his claws. Certainly, the Alsop report was investigated more thoroughly than that of Lucy Scales. Karl Bell and Mike Dash argue that this may have been on account of different classes, since “Lucy Scales’s more modest background would have been considered intrinsically less reliable, and of less interest, by most newspapers and newspaper readers of the day” (Bell 2012, 28).³

Some of these accounts have been picked out from accounts published in newspapers – for example the 1826 sighting in Southampton, the sighting in 1837 in Lewisham and the representations made to Sir John Cowan in January 1837 as well as the attacks on Lucy Scales and Jane Alsop. These reports may have some recourse to hyperbole – people frightened to death – or blind faith in the urban legends circulating about Jack where no witnesses could be found. However, Dash observes that the first mention of Polly Adams is found in a flawed “history” by Peter Haining, published in 1977. When Mike Dash wrote to Haining for a reference for his sources, Haining replied that he had loaned his research to a scriptwriter and it was never returned (Dash 1996, 88 n. 26). Stephen Ash suggests that Polly Adams and Mary Stevens, may both be characters who appear in one of the early fictional accounts which is Haining’s original source (Ash, online). Nevertheless, these “early” assaults on women have details from Jack’s later sightings (leaping and vomiting flames) at a time that he was “still switching between the guises of ghost, bear and devil” (Dash 1996, 25).

Furthermore, the sighting of Jack at Turner Street is pieced together from three sources: Vyner, in his 1961 article, cites an obscure but contemporary report in the *Morning Herald*, but he suggests that this visitation was Jack himself, rather than “one of the Spring-Heeled Jack Gang”. Nor does he mention either a cloak or a crest.⁴ Instead these are details that are added by Haining in his monograph: “For under cross examination the following day, the servant boy swore that on the folds of the man’s cloak, just above the corner which he clutched to his face with his claw-like hand, he had seen *an ornate crest of some kind – and below it, in gold filigree, the initial ‘W’*” (Haining 1977, 52). The testimony contains descriptions of the devilish aristocrat, the crest and the embroidered W, which serve to bolster Haining’s hypothesis that Jack is the *alter ego* of the Henry Beresford, 3rd Marquis of Waterford who lived from 1811 to 1859, whose name often reappears in relation to Spring-heeled Jack (Haining 1977, 53). Jack would be the Mr Hyde aspect of the Marquis’s Dr Jekyll façade, the “other-self-in-the-self” as Hogle describes it. (Hogle 2002, 7). However, it would be unlikely for the Marquis to have gone to such an elaborate effort to disguise himself when any part of his apparel could give a clue as to his identity.

³ Mike Dash references this in an updated version of the study that he presented in the *Fortean Times* article, see Dash, n. 31.

⁴ Dash concedes that Vyner “or some other authority he consulted had access to another, almost certainly contemporary, published account of Jack’s early activities that has otherwise been lost”, see Dash, n. 105.

Although there are many other reported sightings it is generally believed that the “pranks” of the first months of 1838 were the work of an individual, but very shortly afterwards there were a number of copycat activities. *The Examiner* newspaper on the 25th March 1838 reported that Charles Grenville, “a tall, ill-favoured young man” had frightened many women and children “by imitating the silly and dangerous pranks of Spring-heeled Jack” although Grenville, who is described as “considered of a weak mind, but perfectly harmless” was discharged when he pleaded that “it was only a bit of fun”. In another example, reported on the 4th April, when the “ghost” leapt out, his victims recognised his voice and he was arrested. He was fined £4 for aggravated assault and was warned that, “If fellows like you think they can frighten respectable females with impunity by imitating the scandalous pranks of Spring-heeled Jack, they will be convinced of their mistake by finding themselves within the walls of Newgate” (*The Morning Post*, 4th April 1838).

Without doubt the antics of Spring-heeled Jack and his imitators had made him a household name, one that may have appealed to the general interest in the Urban Gothic. Just four days after the *Outrage on a Young Lady*, on Monday the 26th February 1838, the first melodrama based on the ghost, *Spring-Heel Jack*, was staged at the Royal Pavilion Theatre. The title-character, *Spring-Heel Jack*, was played by Mr. Graham, as advertised in *The Satirist Newspaper*.⁵

A very different kind of attack is attributed to Jack on Jacob’s Island in Bermondsey on the 12th November 1845. Charles Dickens describes these slums in *Oliver Twist* as containing “every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage: all these ornament the banks of Jacob’s Island” (Dickens 1954, 381). Here a prostitute named Maria Davis was attacked during the daytime on a bridge over the open sewer called Folly’s Ditch, “eight feet deep and fifteen or twenty wide when the tide is in” (Dickens 1954, 380). It is said that Jack spat blue and white flame into her face, then threw her from the bridge, and she drowned in this culvert.

The root of this story seems plausible: how many “gentlemen”, having taken advantage of the services of a young girl, would then resort to violence to avoid paying afterwards? And the death of a prostitute from the slums, one who had been “reduced to a desolate condition indeed, who seek a refuge in Jacob’s Island” is hardly likely to stir interest among the authorities. Unsurprisingly, a verdict of “Death by misadventure” was recorded, but the locals were less than happy with

⁵ Mike Dash, pers. comm. (email 1 December 2015). He continues “Spring-Heeled Jack’s audience was not just the working class, another Spring-Heeled Jack piece played at Braham’s upscale theatre in the West End in 1838. The title role was taken by the popular singer-comedian John Pritt Harley (*Actors by Daylight*, 1838, Vol. 1, 14).”; cf. Bell 2012, 182, n.43. A second play, “The Curse of the Wraydons” was written by Maurice Sandoz in 1928 and is based on the 1904 Penny Dreadful series; this was adapted into a film in 1946, directed by Victor M. Gover and starred Bruce Seton as “Jack Wraydon”. This film is also known by the title *Strangler’s Morgue*.

this and Jack had the crime of murder added to his charge sheet. Needless to say, the actions recorded in this encounter are out of character (and long after the accepted chronology) for Jack, and this, like many other sensational encounters, is recorded by Haining (Haining 1977, 85–6). Dash argues that “an examination of the surviving London coroner’s records and death certificates shows that no such incident ever occurred”.⁶ Such descriptions – Lucy Scales, Jane Alsop, Maria Davis are all in keeping with male Gothic literary tropes. Anne Williams notes that the female Gothic tradition is to explain the ghosts: this is not the case for Spring-heeled Jack as neither his identity nor his motivation are explained. Furthermore, Williams suggests that the focus of female horror is on terror, however, the descriptions of the Spring-heeled Jack encounters are of a visceral, horrific attack, which only serve to emphasize Jack’s villainy and his violence towards women (Williams 1995, 103–4).

If the Maria Davis encounter was added by Haining, then it may well have been inspired by an episode in the 1863 forty-part “Penny Dreadful” series, titled *Spring-heel’d Jack: the Terror of London*, with the subtitle “A romance of the nineteenth century”. Haining notes that the “Penny Dreadful” series, which developed in the 1860s mostly presented stories of “lurid adventures of youthful heroes” while the earlier stories of the “Penny Blood” series popular in the 1830s through to the 1850s dealt with more adult themes in “Blood and thunder”, and was perhaps related to the *Sturm und drang* style of Gothic novel of the end of the eighteenth century (Haining 1975, 17). While the historical sightings of Jack are to cause terror, the fictional Jack uses his disguise to overcome justice. Quite simply, as Punter and Byron posit, Jack is the “monster” who is “located at the margins of culture”, but it is precisely this kind of monster that highlights hypocrisy, abuse and bullying behavior (Punter and Byron 2004, 263).

In the 1863 (reprinted in 1867) series, it is acknowledged that Jack has a reputation as a highwayman, lying in wait for a passing carriage, as well as those legends that had risen around him of a ghost or a murderer. His appearance is informed by the descriptions given by Lucy Scales and Jane Alsop, “a tall form, whose head and body glower with a blue, phosphorescent fire, from the back of which hung, in graceful folds, a long striped cloak” (SHJ 1867, 23). However, rather than terrorising young women, as reported in 1838, in the “Penny Dreadful” stories, those who fear Jack are generally those who bully and victimise young women, otherwise his image as a “terror” is not maintained:

What his true object could be none have been able to conjecture. Certain it is that robbery was not the cause for he was never known to take a single coin from his victims, even when fright rendered them almost insensible; nor did he ever practice any other degree of cruelty beyond affrightening them (SHJ 1867, 2).

⁶ Dash notes that Haining’s book cites three other instances where Jack has been responsible for the deaths of his victims between 1848 and 1887, see “Spring-heeled Jack and the terrified child”.

That said, Jack acknowledges that he has done wrong things in the past for which he needs to atone, and he still enjoys creative mischief and confusion (SHJ 1867, 3). Even so, one of his early adventures is to save a young woman, Ellen Folder, from her violent and abusive landlord; however, she is still driven to suicide and hurls herself into the Thames.

As his hand was within a few inches of her dress, Ellen sprang away from his grasp, out over the balustrade into the space beyond and disappeared from his sight.

A moment Jack stood like one transfixed to the earth – then on to the seat he sprang, dashed his hat to the ground, and strove to tear his cloak from his shoulders [...] he mounted the balustrade, cast one look down into the black waters beneath, then sprang far, far out from the narrow ledge, resolved to save or perish in the attempt (SHJ 1867, 32).

Jack does indeed save the young woman, as well as a number of other victims of oppression, although he still has occasion to play pranks where he sees fit. In addition, Jack is seen without his mask and is recognised on several occasions. In a passage in the final chapter, Jack is seized by a watchman. Struggling to get free,

Jack's mask slipped from his face, the light flashing from the adjacent lamp flashing on his features he was recognised by the man who held him, and who, in his younger days, had been a servant in his father's family.

"Spring-heeled Jack!" he shouted. "The Mar--"

A heavy blow on the mouth from Jack's fist stifled the word, and released him from the watchman's hold (SHJ 1867, 318).

There are a few places in this series where Jack chooses to remove his mask in order to reveal who he is, and on each occasion he is identified only as "The Mar--". This is an example of the two aspects of Jack's divided self coming together (Davison 2009, 213). Clearly an aristocrat, as he is recognised by the nobility or, as shown above, by a former servant of his family; when facing the "Libertine", Richard Clavering, Jack tells him, "I command here while I remain", even though he is in Clavering's own house (SHJ 1867, 44). Although this is never explained, it is undoubtedly an allusion to the Marquis of Waterford who, as mentioned above, was occasionally named as a possible candidate for Spring-heeled Jack. Local legend describes the "Mad Marquis" in relation to his drunkenness, vandalism and general anti-social behaviour, although Karl Bell acknowledges that the correlation between Marquis and masked prankster are "based on little more than the bad reputation of a drunken hell raiser", and that this is a "lazy supposition" (Bell 2012, 35, 103–6). While there had been some contemporary observation that connected Jack and the Marquis, it is mentioned briefly in *All the Year Round*, although it concludes that "not a shadow of proof could ever be adduced to support this theory" (*All the Year Round*,

9th August 1884, 346). The connection with the Marquis is also mentioned in Brewer's *Reader's Handbook* (1896). The entry on Spring-Heel Jack describes how:

The Marquis of Waterford, in the early parts of the nineteenth century, used to amuse himself by springing on travellers unawares, to terrify them; and from time to time others have followed his silly example [...] I myself investigated some of the cases reported to me, but found them for the most part Fakenham ghost tales (Brewer 1896, 939).

Some contemporary reports refer to the perpetrator of these attacks as one from the "higher ranks of life" which has been read as a reference to the Marquis as the kind of nobleman who would take a wager to cause terror by appearing in the nine different parishes (Dash 1996, 44, citing *The Times*, 9th January 1838). However, in the 1863 stories, once Jack's mission to protect the vulnerable is completed, and he has been recognised by the watchman, he declares: "This unfortunate discovery renders my presence in England dangerous to my safety. I must fly". Having escaped to the coast, "Jack sprang out over the rock into the glistening sea" while the fates of those that Jack helped are intertwined and all achieve a positive ending (SHJ 1867, 318).

A later series of instalments initially published by Charles Fox around April 1878 and then reprinted in six issues of the *Boy's Standard* between the 18th July and the 22nd August 1885 sets forth an argument that Beresford could not have been Spring-heeled Jack, although the narrator admits that "the manner of proving it does not redound to the noble marquis's credit" (SHJ 1878, 3-4). This story describes how Jack had been involved in incidents between the 4th and 6th April 1837, while the Marquis was tried at the Derby assizes for committing an assault at the Croxton Park Races at Waltham on the Wolds near Melton Mowbray at the time. It continues by erroneously suggesting that the attacks on Jane Alsop and Lucy Scales occurred in 1837, a year earlier than actually reported; even if it could be proved that Polly Adams was attacked in October 1837, the assault at Croxton Park took place six months *before* this. According to these reports, the Marquis and his friend attempted to overturn a caravan and when the watchmen arrived, the marquis challenged one to a fight; the marquis and his "gentleman" friends overwhelmed the watchman and then proceeded to paint him red - they also painted several doors and windows of nearby houses which gave rise to the expression "paint the town red". Thus, when the Marquis was tried and fined, the narrator reports that "our readers will see that this disgraceful affair proves conclusively that the Marquis of Waterford and Spring-Heeled Jack had a separate existence, unless the Marquis was gifted with the power of being in two places at once" (SHJ 1878, 6). Clearly, the emphasis of these details was to ground the story in reality, rather than considering the uncanny motif of the double.

Having dismissed the Marquis from being a possible candidate, the 1878 series then embarks on a story to explain Jack's origins. It begins with accounts from Jane Alsop and Lucy Scales which are very close to the news reports, noting that "these are almost all of the published facts about this extraordinary man" (SHJ 1878, 13).

Thus, this description of events serves to ground the narrative in reality by presenting recorded facts. The narrator claims that he has read the account of Spring-heeled Jack in a manuscript and once again this textual evidence adds credibility to the narrative. The narrator declares,

we have been favoured by the descendants of Spring-Heeled Jack with the perusal of his "Journal" or "Confessions", call it what you will. The only condition imposed upon us in return for this very great favour is that we conceal the real name of the hero of this truly remarkable story (SHJ 1878, 14).

The reason for this secrecy is obvious:

The descendants of Spring-Heeled Jack are at the present time large landed proprietors in the South of England, and although had it not been for our hero's exploits they would not at the present time be occupying that position, still one can hardly wonder at their not wishing the real name of Spring-Heeled Jack to become known (SHJ 1878, 14).

The name that the narrator chooses to call his "hero" is Jack Dacre, born in the Year of Waterloo, and son of a baronet "whose creation went back as far as 1619" (SHJ 1878, 14). This is perhaps an allusion to Charlotte Dacre, author of the Gothic novel, *Zofloya; or, The Moor*. The themes of this novel include the role of patriarchal power, as well as questions of morality, themes we also see in the other Spring-heeled Jack stories. As always in the aristocracy, the elder son inherits the title and the estate and lives up to his income, while the younger is sent away, in this case out to India, with nothing but a good aristocratic education in order to establish his reputation in his own right.

After his father's death, Jack returns to England, although he is shipwrecked en-route and saved by Ned Chump, a sailor who becomes his assistant. At Dacre Hall, Jack discovers his cousin Michael has taken over, and although Jack is welcomed, the reader discovers that Michael has bribed Jack's lawyer, one of the only people who could verify Jack's identity, and further plots Jack's death. When Jack is expelled from the hall, he swears his revenge on Michael and he and Ned construct a device to help him to jump based on the teachings of an Indian *Moonshee* – a Muslim teacher. He also dresses himself in a theatrical gown in the style of Mephistopheles but this is only to collect his due and to strike terror into the guilty. Amongst his adventures, Jack overcomes a corrupt tenant "who had possessed himself of the lease in an unlawful manner" since the tenant's niece is the true owner of the farm, but was being held prisoner (SHJ 1878, 41). The niece consequently represents the "troubled and persecuted virgin" of Gothic stories with no relatives to protect her (Punter and Byron 2006, 137), and, as Kate Fergusson Ellis notes for the young lady's situation more generally, the heroine finds herself in "an enclosed space that should have been a refuge for evil but has become the very opposite, a

prison" (Ellis 1989, xiii). Amongst Jack's exploits, he also strikes terror into the heart of his cousin when he holds up a mail coach in which Michael and his lawyer are travelling. We are told that "Although the newspapers of the time inform us that Jack committed many robberies, there is no doubt that this is incorrect". Jack may have robbed his cousin and his corrupt lawyer, but he argues that this money belongs to him anyway. He returns hundreds of pounds to the passengers travelling with them.

The story ends with Jack saving a baronet's daughter from the evil machinations of her stepmother. Once Jack recovers his heritage, he marries the baronet's daughter. So, the entire story is focused on Jack reclaiming what belongs to him as an aristocrat. He is not like the noble who defends the poor as seen in the folklore of Robin Hood, nor is he villainous (and at the same time romanticised) as in the legends surrounding Dick Turpin. Instead, this story is an "origin myth" of how Jack fashioned his springs. As with all the other "Penny Dreadful" stories, in this story, he doesn't deserve the epithet "the Terror of London", particularly in relation to the more brutal stories of attack and violation such as those of Polly Adams and Lucy Scales which are discussed at the beginning of the story. However, as Karl Bell argues, when Jack is presented in the "origin" story, "he had started to conform to the familiar mould of penny dreadful stereotypes, thus weakening his previous individuality" (Bell 2012, 206). Even though the name Jack Dacre is a pseudonym, Jack's motivations and abilities are all explained, and the mysteries of his character are reduced to him being an aristocrat with a devilish mask and spring-loaded boots; consequently, the character loses his mystique.

Yet the reports of Spring-heeled Jack continued: there was another documented case at the British Army camp at Aldershot in Hampshire which became attached to the sightings of Spring-heeled Jack, even though the appearance was described as a sheet-clad phantom. This incident is discussed in an article by Roman Golicz, entitled *Spring-heeled Jack: A Victorian Visitation at Aldershot*. In March 1877, the report described that during night duty:

A sentry was on duty at the North camp, and about midnight someone came towards him, who refused to answer the usual challenge of "who comes there", and after dodging about the sentry box in a fantastic fashion for some little time, made off with astonishing swiftness, not however until the sentry had loaded his rifle and fired (*Sheldrake's Aldershot & Sandhurst Military Gazette*, 17th March 1877, cited in Dash 1996, 17).

This figure was seen again at a second sentry post near the cemetery. The report concluded with a caution that "enjoyment of this kind had better be discontinued before one of the nocturnal pranks leads to unpleasant results" (Dash 1996, 17; cf. Golicz 2006, 2). A second incident was reported on the 18th April where the ghost had sneaked up to the sentry box, attempted to grab the sentry's rifle and then slapped the sentry in the face before leaping away "with astonishing bounds" (*The*

Times, 28th April 1866; discussed by Dash 1996, 19). The sentries involved in this instance were investigated for deserting their posts (Golicz 2006, 2). His antics were discontinued until the end of August, but then it is reported that Jack had climbed the sentry box and reached down with a dead-cold hand to touch or slap the face with the guard on duty. Jack's identity was eventually uncovered when a sentry bayoneted him in the leg, and the wounded man was revealed to be a subaltern officer (Bell 2012, 40. The Aldershot case was covered by Valentine Dyll in *Everybody's Magazine* in 1954).

The Aldershot sighting appears as only a silly trick played on apprehensive guards on sentry duty where the epithet of Spring-heeled Jack was attached to an apparently ghostly sighting. The popularity of the Jack stories meant there were many copycat incidents and these ensured he didn't remain encased in the pages of the "Penny Dreadful" stories. Another literary voice who described the pranks was Beatrix Potter, whose journal entry for the 1st March 1877 describes how:

There has been a most singular nuisance going on since Christmas around Manchester. A gang of young men calling themselves *Spring-heeled Jacks* have been going about in the dusk and frightening people. They wore India-rubber dresses which would puff up at will to a great size, horns, a lantern and springs in their boots (Potter 1966, 181).

Potter describes them as cowardly bullies and as thieves for they took money, and wonders if they are "Medical Students from Owens College, and it is not impossible". Potter goes on to describe how they frighten a gentleman "inside out of his wits" and a "poor girl who nearly had a fit". However, when authorities send some detectives, one pretends to search for money when confronted with a *Jack*, but instead produces handcuffs (Potter 1966, 181).

Jack's final appearance was reported to have been in Everton in Liverpool during September 1904. This may have also been inspired by the "Penny Dreadful" series published in the same year. It is reported that, over a few nights Jack appeared in his traditional guise of mask, cloak and boots, and jumped some twenty-five feet into the air; however, his exploits seemed limited to amusing himself by beguiling and frightening his audience with his abilities, as he leapt across the terrace roofs. While this was covered by contemporary newspapers, it was reported some decades later that "Jack" was a man suffering from religious mania who shouted "my wife is the devil" and would leap across rooftops to escape the police. The locals witnessing the delusions of a terrified man no doubt merged with the legend of Spring-heeled Jack to create the reported story (*News of the World*, 25th September 1904; *Liverpool Echo*, 19th May 1967; cited in Dash 1996, 21). As Killeen explains, "the ghost story usually ends with an 'exorcism' in which the ghost is evicted from the house and the supernatural evacuated from the natural" (Killeen 2009, 133-4), but in the case of the historical sightings of Spring-heeled Jack, he simply disappears away. While in the published stories of Spring-heeled Jack, the serials finished in 1904, and, by this time,

Jack had been given a backstory to provide a logical explanation for his actions, and he could be perceived as an aristocrat using his statue to correct injustice.

There are other examples of encounters with Spring-heeled Jack, from the south coast of England and Guernsey, as far west as Neath in South Wales and as far north as Edinburgh. Excluding them from this article is dictated by the space available, as well as the issue that many of the encounters may have been fabricated by later writers. While the 1837 reports of the “devil-like gentleman” are most likely more recent fabrications, the attacks on Jane Alsop and Lucy Scales were genuine, most likely the work of one person (or one attacker with an accomplice) even if their attacker was trading on the reputation of ghost stories that had been circulating since the beginning of the century to create the ambiance of fear. After that, it appears that any genuine later attacks were perpetrated by an imitator, or that Spring-heeled Jack has become a convenient scapegoat for an unsolved crime. Other stories still are no more than a product of imagination. Although it is said that some of Jack’s victims “died of fright” such reports are most likely exaggerations. Elizabeth Villiers argues that “Spring-Heeled Jack” should not be included in a list of criminal adventurers since, except by very vague rumour, no actual crime was ever laid to his charge (Villiers 1928, 238). Essentially, there are two versions of Spring-heeled Jack: the historical entity whose role was to terrorise; and the fictional Jack who acknowledged his past transgressions and acted, as Punter and Byron describe, “to police the boundaries of the human, pointing to those lines that must not be crossed” (Punter and Byron 2004, 264). Clearly the story of Jack’s antics, both as the “Terror of London” and of the protagonist of the “Penny Dreadful” stories who protected the vulnerable, caught and held the public’s imagination. It is perhaps of no surprise, then, that the image of Jack, the bloodthirsty hunter of London’s slums, would return to the public’s consciousness in 1888, now armed with a knife and a new sobriquet, Jack ‘the Ripper’, quickly became front page news.

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Contributor Details

J. S. Mackley is a Senior Lecturer in English and Creative Writing at the University of Northampton, England. He holds an MA in Late Medieval Studies and a PhD in English, both from the University of York. He has published and spoken widely on his areas of research interests in Medieval Literature, Folklore, Gothic and Fantasy Literature. His academic publications include *The Legend of St Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman versions* (Brill, 2008), and a novel, *The Gawain Legacy* (Cosmic Egg Books, 2014).

E-mail: jon.mackley@northampton.ac.uk

MATTHEW THOMPSON

Australian National University

The Victim as Exhibit: ‘Outcast London’, Objectification, and Ethics in Public History Displays of Jack the Ripper

ABSTRACT

There are few figures in Victorian History that are as readily identifiable as Jack the Ripper. Despite the fact that very little is actually known about the Ripper him/herself, the sensationalism and cultural capital that the Ripper has accumulated over the years has ensured that even today the Ripper is still able to attract much public fascination. It is of no surprise, then, that the Ripper is often utilised as a centrepiece for museum exhibits and displays- particularly in Britain. However due to the absolute unknowns surrounding the Ripper himself, much of the ‘hard facts’ that such exhibits show revolve around the victims of the Ripper, particularly the women who are known as the ‘Canonical Five’. However, the way that these victims are often portrayed to the general public has generated outrage amongst certain groups for their objectification of the women, claiming that many of the displays were more about sensationalism than information. This paper will show that the narratives of the contemporary ‘New Journalist’ movement were instrumental in creating a Gothic ‘Outcast London’ that even today has marginalised the victims of the Ripper in favour of a narrative that perpetuates this constructed exotic realm.

Keywords: Jack the Ripper, Victims, Exhibit, Museum, Outcast London

There have been few figures in modern history that have managed to capture the public imagination with so little actual hard facts as Jack the Ripper. Even today, over one hundred years later, the crimes continue to permeate the imagination of the contemporary audience due to the sheer mystique that surrounds the figure. Indeed, as historian Philip Sugden puts it, “[a]fter a series of horrific murders Jack the Ripper disappeared [...] and left behind a mystery as impenetrable as the fog that forms part of his legend. He left us, in short, with the classic ‘whodunnit’” (Sugden 2006, 3). To this end, the texts that have continued to speculate about the identity and the methodology of the killer, loosely categorised by the term ‘Ripperology’, continue to advocate numerous different suspects and motives. This fascination with the killer’s identity has also fuelled his own cultural capital and mystique, ensuring that the public remains intrigued about the figure of the Ripper even 128 years after the crimes were actually committed. However, the notion of attempting to pin down concrete facts about the Ripper’s identity, motives, background, or methods remains as difficult as ever as evidence remains at a minimum. It is here that ‘Ripperologists’ (not to be mistaken for the journal of the same name) have attempted to fill the void with various theories about the identities and motives of the Ripper. While these authors have often operated with the best of intentions, there is no doubt that their speculation has done more to enshrine the Ripper in a mythology that has captured the public consciousness. Therefore, the most prominently known theories are not often the most credible, but rather the ones that, as author Alan Moore states, “mirrors our hysterias” or constructs the Ripper as “the receptacle for each new social panic” (Moore and Campbell 2006, 22).

Through this continuous connectedness to contemporary anxieties, through the construction and re-construction of his identity, the mythology surrounding the Ripper has continued to grow. This is not merely a recent phenomenon, but rather one that harks back to the beginning of the Ripper’s construction when he was placed in a media narrative that “employed mainly Gothic conventions” (Ho 2006, 105). Indeed, through these tropes and conventions the Ripper was seen as part of the ‘urbanised’ Gothic space alongside Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Stevenson’s Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (Frayling 1986, 206). These stories reflected a shift where instead of finding peace and respite by “breaking out of the oppressive home into the outside”, they would be “unlikely to find solace or sanctuary in the urban darkness haunted by the likes of Jack the Ripper” (Cavallaro 2002, 31). However, this mythology and gothic imagery has often marginalised the female victims of the Ripper in order to preserve the mystique of the murderer. As Elisa Warkentin states, “it is nearly a generic requirement—to focus principally on describing and identifying the Ripper, secondarily on explaining his motives and methods, and only reluctantly on his victims” (Warkentin 2010, 36). Such approaches are writ large in public history exhibitions found in museums, which turn to using the victims as a way to convey the horror of the Ripper’s crimes. Thus, these exhibits have often been criticised for being exploitative rather than educational. This paper will therefore argue how these gothic tropes from the nineteenth century, which have been perpetuated through the community of Ripperology, have been re-

assumed in the way that the Ripper crimes are constructed in public history institutions, allowing for the victims to be objectified as grotesque gothic images, rather than true historical persons.

Much of what is assumed about the figure of Jack the Ripper has been constructed by the so-called 'Ripperologists', a loose community that claim expertise in the crimes of Jack the Ripper (Wilson 2012, 412). However, it would be erroneous to say that this community is similar to a united academic discipline with legitimate ideas of discourse. A better comparison would be to compare Ripperology to the New Journalist movements of the Late Victorian period, as both use speculation and a narrow range of facts to generate a narrative that suited their end. Indeed, much of the revelations about the East End could be put down to the New Journalist movement exploiting the more sensationalist aspects of the Ripper crimes in order to attempt to convey the plight of areas such as Whitechapel and Limehouse to a greater population, with radical newspapers such as *the Pall Mall Gazette* evoking a gothic imagery of the metropolis, claiming:

Hundreds of women in this sad East-end lead their degraded lives of sin for daily bread or to secure a night's shelter in a fourpenny lodging house, a fact of which none can now plead ignorance, for the horrors of a few weeks (to our shame as a nation be it said) have brought out in awful relief the conditions under which so many of our fellow-creatures exist, and which, though told persistently and without exaggeration by East-end workers, have made but little impression. (Steer 1888)

Articles such as this, coupled with the shocking and lurid details of the Ripper crimes themselves, constructed an exotic and Gothicised image of the district of Whitechapel, "a moral landscape of light and darkness, a nether region of illicit sex and crime, both exciting and dangerous" (Walkowitz 1982, 547). While one could argue many of the facts of this so-called 'Outcast London' had been known before, many citizens seemed to be galvanised into action after the Whitechapel murders, with Dr Thomas Bernardo, an Irish doctor and social reformer (and later Ripper suspect), collecting almost £3 million from "conscience-stricken Victorians" (Odell 2006, 216) during his appeals for his "homes for the waifs and strays" (as noted in the *Morning Post* on the 24th December 1888). However, while radical newspapers were willing to grapple with the Ripper as a symptom of class dichotomy and the exotic and seemingly gothic 'Outcast London', many fewer writers were prepared to engage with the idea of the Ripper as a perpetuator of sexualised violence. Indeed, while prominent Late Victorian feminists such as Florence Fenwick Miller and Kate Mitchell attempted to approach the issue, they "remained isolated interventions in an overwhelmingly patriarchal debate; they were discounted or ignored by other dailies and failed to mobilize women over the issues" (Walkowitz 1982, 567). This thematic positioning would continue, as the speculation surrounding the Ripper would evolve into the community colloquially known as Ripperology.

Many different authors have speculated about the Ripper's identity since the murders occurred in 1888. This loose community was labelled with the term 'Ripperology' by author Colin Wilson in the mid-1970s. However, rather than embrace the label and the community, many authors who speculate on the Ripper actually attempt to position themselves as *opposing* the community. Bruce Robinson claimed, in his book *They All Love Jack* (2015): "Ripperology is like a gang of shagged-out seagulls in the wake of a phantom steamer," (Robinson 2015, 157) while Patricia Cornwell compared Ripperologists to Klingons, dismissing their views as archaic and amateur (Cornwell 2014, 57). However, no matter if these authors claim to be part of or against the community of Ripperology, many of them evoke a gothic and grotesque imagery that is similar to that of the articles of the 'Autumn of Terror' in 1888. Bruce Robinson describes Whitechapel as a place the denizens "ate, slept and wiped their arses in cellars full of vermin and promiscuous death [...] [However] the Victorians managed to persuade themselves that this suburb of hell was nothing to do with them" (Robinson 2015, 4). Such notions of the alien and the dangerous are reminiscent of Ripperologist Stephen Knight's description in *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (1976) about "the squalid environs of the Docklands, where almost without exception a passing Englishman would feel an alien in his own land" (Knight 1976, 82), or (self-proclaimed 'Non-Ripperologist') Shirley Harrison's description of Whitechapel having a "choking stench of urine, mildew and rotting fruit, vegetables and fish" (S. Harrison 1998, 91).

Such a fascination with the notion of Outcast London however, allowed these authors to be left open to notions of trivialising a horrible crime. Indeed, many authors seem to romanticise the notion of the resolution of the mystery by placing *themselves* into the narrative by constructing a 'showdown' of sorts between the Ripper and the author. While there is no doubt a tongue-in-cheek aspect to much of these remarks, such as Bruce Robinson's claim of: "Look out Jack [...] I'm going to bust your arse" (Robinson 2015, xiii), they are engaging more with the Gothic myth of the Ripper, rather than the actual murderer. This engagement with the myth makes for problematic public history as it merely perpetuates the idea that the Ripper,

can have been no sick common man with tortuous inadequacies, but must rather be associated with other legendary attributes. He must have been a magician, of royal blood, an avenging angel, a gentleman or a distinguished surgeon (Daniel 2012, 132).

This is not helped by the fact that there is a plethora of theories that continue to remake the image of the Ripper each and every year. Indeed, Ripperologist Paul Harrison wrote that "today it is not a matter of who Jack the Ripper was, it is more a case of destroying other writers' theories in order to proffer one's own as being the most suitable" (P. Harrison 2009, 198). Even with that in mind, however, the theories that truly manage to capture the larger public imagination are those that can 'live up' to the Ripper myth.

As the Ripper myth has continued to grow, it has become gentrified and commoditised from subversive counter-cultural icon to “official heritage” (Phillips and Witchard 2010, 2). This became more pronounced during the gentrification of the East End, as the once so-called ‘Outcast London’ areas of Spitalfields and Whitechapel became part of what David Cunningham refers to as a new Gothic re-appropriation (Cunningham 2007, 170). This appropriation also affected the figure of the Ripper, as could be seen during the centennial of the Whitechapel Crimes in 1988. During this year in particular, London found itself awash with various antiquarian gimmickry attempting to encapsulate an ‘old worlde atmosphere’. However, such gimmickry also raised questions about whether such ventures were actually trivialising horrific crimes, which in turn would be trivialising the whole topic of sexual violence against women. The Jack the Ripper pub, which was renamed in 1975 from the Ten Bells (Begg and Bennett 2013, 254), found itself in hot water from protesters after they announced that T-shirts, postcards, and a special blood red drink known as the Ripper Tipple, would be on sale to celebrate the Centennial (ibid, 255). The protests continued, headed by the groups Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) and Action Against the Ripper Centenary (AARC). Both groups managed to place sufficient pressure on the pub’s owners to ensure that the Jack the Ripper would revert to its original name of the Ten Bells, though they still sold the paraphernalia (ibid, 255). The groups would continue to protest against many other institutions who they saw were “using the sexual murder of women to entertain and titillate” the general public in order to make a quick profit (ibid, 257). This included the re-release of Screaming Lord Sutch’s Single *Jack the Ripper* in 1987, also to coincide with the centennial, with a promotional video to be shot in Whitechapel (ibid, 257). The video, with Sutch seen chasing women around the streets of Whitechapel, was met with outrage from AARC spokeswoman Anne McMurdie who claimed that:

It is simply endorsing male violence against women, further glorifying the Ripper who has become some sort of folk hero. As to filming it on the original site [of the murders], well that just shows no sensitivity to at all women. I am completely horrified and think it is sick. This is just men jumping on the bandwagon and trying to make money out of something that was an obscene event and should not be remembered fondly (McMurdie 1988).

McMurdie’s concerns once again emphasise the oppression of the victims’ voice and perspective in order to attempt to sensationalise and commodify the Ripper crimes.

Exploits such as Sutch’s song as well as those of the Ten Bells pub spoke to an attempt to reclaim and perhaps ‘re-Gothicise’ the exotic and dangerous notions of the Whitechapel area. Such notions attempted to construct the Ripper not as a historical murderer, but rather a Victorian character “who belongs within a larger cast of late nineteenth century characters [...] populating an imaginary fog-engulfed city” (Cunningham 2007, 167). Indeed, there is little doubt that events such as the

staging of a Jack the Ripper musical, with songs like the very jaunty 'Ripper's Going to Get You', reduced and distorted the public history significance to little more than an antiquarian frivolity, making the notion of credible inquiry somewhat redundant (Pember and De Marne 1975). These notions of 'Outcast London' being reborn even went beyond the realm of business, with East End prostitutes not only reporting to the *East London Advertiser* of having their pictures taken with tourists, but actually having requests from clients to be taken to the Ripper's murder sites for sex (Begg and Bennett 2013, 258). It is little wonder then that the *Sunday Times*' Stephen Pile would write dismayingly:

More utter nonsense has been written about Jack the Ripper than any other figure, real or imagined. Next year marks the centenary of this total pervert and we shall never hear the end of it. [...] From the start authors have manipulated the complete absence of any known facts to engineer sensational conclusions. And so a highly profitable industry was born (Pile 1987).

Indeed, even some Ripperologists such as William Beadle believed that such exploits, like those in the Ten Bells, trivialised the murders (Woods and Baddeley 2009, 129). Furthermore, by exploiting the myth of the Ripper, these various businesses were celebrating "the Ripper as a 'hero' of crime" (Walkowitz 1982, 569), rather than portraying his victims as little more than helpless, and this was to continue as the Ripper began to make forays into museums and exhibitions.

The perspectives of the victims of Jack the Ripper, as mentioned above, have often been set aside in favour of more powerful or more contemporary themes. This was no doubt exacerbated by the fact that these women were regarded with little compassion and reverence when they were alive in 1888, and although some, such as Annie Chapman and Polly Nicholls, had children, they were often estranged from their descendants (Jakubowski and Bruand 2009, 16-57). Exhibits in various public institutions around London have exploited these factors in the past thirty years to ensure that the depiction of the Ripper's victims could be manipulated in a way to create maximum impact upon their audience. Perhaps one of the first important exhibits to do this was Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors which portrayed an alive Mary Kelly waiting on a street corner with the body of Catherine Eddowes near her already mutilated, although reproduced in such a way that most of her body mutilations were not on full display (Woods and Baddeley 2009, 170). The anachronisms aside, since Kelly and Eddowes didn't die within the same month let alone the same night, the viewer is able to venture back to a totally fabricated 'Ripper's London', with the alive but unsuspecting Kelly and the murdered Eddowes as their reference points. These two victims are therefore not constructed as true representatives of the real women, of their gender or their class, but rather passive participants in the Ripper's own world. In fact, the true protagonist of the scene, the Ripper, is not there at all. This is not because of any ethical compunction to attempt to dim his mystique, however, but simply because they did not know what he looked like, making the idea of creating a waxwork of him totally fictional,

though they have had waxworks of various suspects of the Ripper through the years due to their connections to other crimes (Woods and Baddeley 2009, 169). Tussaud's exhibit, which began in 1980, continued throughout the Ripper Centennial and became a big part of the attraction of the Chamber of Horrors, as more and more tourists looked to places where they could get a tangible sense of the Ripper's crimes.

If Madame Tussaud's could be accused of exploiting victims, at least it did so with a modicum of restraint by attempting to cover up the worst of the gore and sensationalism. Less can be said for the *London Dungeon*, a museum of sorts which today claims on its website to be "a thrill-filled journey through London's murky past" that creates the exhibit through

an amazing cast of theatrical actors, special effects, stages, scenes and rides in a truly unique and exciting walkthrough experience that you see, hear, touch, smell and feel. It's hilarious fun and it's sometimes a bit scary (London Dungeon: 'What is the London Dungeon').

In 1993, the *London Dungeon* released its Jack the Ripper experience with a marked increase in gore and sensationalism. The life-sized model of the body of Catherine Eddowes, who had been portrayed in Madame Tussaud's exhibit to ensure that the worst mutilations were difficult, if not impossible to see, was now exhibited naked and in full view of the audience, complete with mutilations bare and exposed in order to exploit their full horror. Likewise, the other victims who hadn't even been in the Chamber of Horrors (Kelly was alive) were also displayed as little more than an exhibit with little regard given for the ethics of objectifying these women in such a way. Once again, their objectification did not attempt to grapple with the notions of sexual violence that the crimes of Jack the Ripper obviously raised, but rather re-constructed the gothic and grotesque imagery that had pervaded the Whitechapel of 1888. Adding to this 'atmosphere' was the fact that the tour was being led by an actor or actress playing a cockney tour guide, sometimes a prostitute themselves. Such attitudes would soon catch the eye of the Campaign Against Pornography, who argued through their co-ordinator Rachel Wingfield that:

It is grotesque that for the sake of an afternoon's entertainment, the man responsible for the violent and horrific deaths of these women is being made into a hero. Sexual violence against women is being trivialised and used as titillation (published in the *Independent* on the 27th of June, 1993).

The London Dungeon, attempting to respond to such claims, said through their marketing director Feisal Khalif:

We have given careful consideration as to whether it should be a rose-tinted picture or a realistic one. We think we have done it in an unglamorous way. There's obviously an element of entertainment, but we believe there are many

lessons to be learned from such horrific crimes (also published in the *Independent* in 27th of June, 1993).

However, the notion of 'educating' their viewers on the dangers of the Ripper's crimes was somewhat undermined by the culmination of the tour in which the Ripper's spirit returns from hell in the form of another life-sized model and 'attacks' the audience, leaping out from a wall panel (*The London Dungeon- Jack the Ripper Section*, 1998, 2010). Furthermore, it was difficult for the Dungeon to take the moral high ground when they were selling the Ripper Steak Sandwich at the Ripper's Rapid Snacks snack bar next door to the Ripper Mania souvenir shop which sold mugs, t-shirts and hats emblazoned with a sinister looking man holding a bloody knife (Begg and Barnett 2013, 259).

The irony of all this is that such is the fascination with the Ripper that many of these protest groups probably did more to enhance the cultural mystique of the Ripper than to tear it down. Just as the sensationalist narratives of the 1888 press used gothic tropes of the East End and the Ripper to attempt to make sense of the seemingly random attacks, many would have been drawn to attempt to discern their *own* meaning out of the great mystery, thus they were "engaged in an intellectual task similar to our Victorian predecessors" (Walkowitz 1982, 546). This is also supported by the fact that the new 'Cool Britannia' movement that had become popular in the mid- to late 1990s embraced the Ripper "because he is capable of being a British 'brand' both at home and in the global market place" (Ho 2006, 108). It is little wonder therefore that the London Dungeon is still going today, and in 2006, it re-opened its Jack the Ripper experience. The experience has been revived to include not only story telling experiences at the Ten Bells pub with landlady Mrs Waldren, but also a Whitechapel Labyrinth adventure where, according to its website, you, with the help of Mary Kelly, must "make your way out of the confusing labyrinth of narrow streets as quick as you can" (London Dungeon 2015). The notion of avoiding Jack in the Whitechapel Labyrinth once again emphasises the importance of the women as props for this newly constructed London, "safely abstracted from the specificities of place" (Cunningham 2007, 75). Once again, the Dungeon came into controversy for its exhibits, this time for plans to employ actual prostitutes in the show to help authenticate the experience. One woman, who took her two children to see the Jack the Ripper exhibit, said that she found the idea sick, claiming that "it absolutely turns my stomach to think of exposing kids to that sort of seediness" (as quoted in the *Daily Mail* on the 29th of January, 2008). The fact that the mother was unfazed by the fact that the Dungeon was re-constructing the environment and exploits of a sexual murderer shows that this 'London' of the London Dungeon was consumed as fiction rather than as history.

The exploits of the London Dungeon actually did more to damage the greater field of Ripperology than it did to damage itself. As said above, the coverage that it received from the Campaign Against Pornography probably gained it a certain notoriety that it was able to exploit for sales. The greater field of Ripperology,

however, continued to find itself seen as trivialising the crimes of the Ripper at a time when they wanted to strive for some sort of academic credibility. This credibility was not helped by the fact that “factual texts about the Ripper [...] seem to prefer the excitement of the hunt for the identity of the criminal over an interest in the poverty-stricken but very ordinary women who were his victims” (Warkentin 2010, 36). To this end, the Jack the Ripper and the East End exhibit, portrayed in the Museum in Docklands in 2008, must have seemed like a welcome relief to those in the Ripperologist community who were attempting to convey the vast academic strides those in their community had made in terms of research, not just of the murders themselves, but also the surrounding factors. Instead of attempting to titillate the audience by focusing just upon the Ripper and his gory exploits, the exhibition reflected the cultural shift that had taken place within Ripperology where the question changed from merely “who was Jack the Ripper” to also “why was Jack the Ripper” (Moody 2011, 10). The letters of the Ripper, along with the so-called Jack the Ripper diary, and the Walter Sickert painting, *Jack the Ripper's Bedroom*, were all present within the exhibition. Furthermore, original police statements as well as the MacNaughten Memorandum were also displayed to show the legal institution's own perspective on the crimes. No suspects were positioned as the favourable choice of the exhibition. Instead the exhibition focussed more on the conditions that made the Ripper's crimes possible (Begg and Bennett 2013, 261).

Nowhere was this better seen than in the portrayal of the victims themselves. Unlike the London Dungeon or Madam Tussaud's before it, the Dockland's exhibit took great pains to explore the plight of East End women and their various ailments. This was further explored with examinations of the various dynamics that were influencing the East End in 1888, including immigration and police suspicion. Indeed, one reviewer rather adroitly renamed the exhibition as ‘The History of the East End (by stealth)’. Furthermore, each of the possible Ripper victims was written about in the exhibit to ensure that the audience had a proper idea of the diversity of these women, to ensure that they were identified as individuals, rather than as just one of a set. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the bodies of the victims were not displayed for all to see but instead seen in a separate area, complete with warnings, where the audience could venture to see small mortuary pictures of the victims in question. This removal of the sensationalist nature of the crimes allowed the audience to be taken behind the romantic veneer of the Ripper crimes, which was so evident in displays like the London Dungeon. However, feminist and blogger Finn MacKay, co-founder of the Feminist Coalition Against Prostitution, was still concerned about the implications of such an exhibition, claiming:

When we do know who they [misogynistic killers] are society brands them monsters, but in the case of Jack the Ripper his cloak shaped void has been filled by a lot of ridiculous romanticised notions and topped off with a hat and cane. Who is he? He is everyman, he could be anyone. He is invisible like most punters are. The truth that should come screaming out of this exhibition is that men have been abusing and killing women in prostitution for

centuries; that these women have always been vulnerable and that stigma has always attached to them rather than the men who choose to exploit them (McKay, 5th of June, 2008).

The press cuttings reproduced in the exhibition illustrate this, showing us that views towards women in prostitution have not changed much. The articles are obsessed with the gory details of how the women were killed, are clear to point out that they were involved in prostitution and prompt the reader to make all the judgements that go with that. It reminded me that society seems so much more interested in prostituted women when they are dead. But only if they are killed in a spectacularly gory way that is, and if there are a lot of killings at once, otherwise nobody is that bothered (McKay, 5th of June, 2008).

Which brings one back to the central conundrum of whether these exhibits' exploitation of the victims of Jack the Ripper is really worth it. While Neo-Victorians such as Kate Mitchell may contend that the notion of nostalgia can be "granted a subversive function, disrupting and diverting the gaze of traditional histories" (Mitchell 2010, 6), the Ripper's victims are often overlooked as beings of any real value besides as corpses. Even Ripperologist Paul Begg makes the point that although the exhibition may have had a lot of new knowledge about the East End, "it still needed the man in the top hat in the fog on its cover to deliver the message" (Begg and Bennett 2013, 263). Much like the contemporary journalists of 1888, one could argue that the Ripper has become a sort of cypher to focus a spotlight on the exotic and dangerous areas of the Victorian East End. However, while the journalists in 1888 were pushing for policy change to an area that had *included* these self-same victims with their sensationalist Gothic narratives, even the most sensitive modern exhibit on Jack the Ripper must contend with the fact that they are contributing to the mythologising of the Ripper without the same agenda for change.

Even today, the difficulty of attempting to bridge public history, the Ripper and the conversation of gendered violence is one that is proving to be a thorny one due to the temptation to return to the tropes that have dominated the Ripper since 1888. This can be seen in Cable Street, London after protesters claimed that a new Jack the Ripper museum was supposed to be a heritage museum about the achievements of women in East London. Many women took to the streets during the 5th of August, 2015, dressed as suffragettes in demonstration against the museum, claiming in the *East London Advertiser*, "[i]t was billed as dedicated to women's history – until it was unveiled as a Ripper museum. That was grotesque, insulting and an abuse of women" (5th August 2015). The Bishopsgates Institute, an organisation which has examined the East End's History, also took a dim view of the museum, claiming in the same article:

we have no problem with the Whitechapel Murders when used as a tool looking at the East End's social conditions of the day – my problem is this

museum's exploitative nature as a purely commercial venture, a tacky tourist attraction (*East London Advertiser*, 5th August 2015).

With a black shop front that dared tourists to "Enter the Morgue" the notion that this museum was going to be an objective look at the murders was soon lost. Even this year, protests continue over the controversial museum. Even the architect himself was quoted in *The Guardian* on the 6th of August, claiming that he was "duped", and that he found the whole exercise "salacious, misogynist rubbish".

There is little doubt that the figure of Jack the Ripper is one that continues to hold a great deal of fascination for many. Furthermore, it is obvious that the Ripper has come to crystallise numerous factors about Victorian London and the East End. To this end, the Ripper can act as a conduit of sorts to illustrate numerous dynamics such as prostitution, 1880s immigration, and overpopulation in the sphere of public history while, like many Neo-Victorian figures, challenging "official historiographies and other dominant images of the past" (Mitchell 2010, 6). However, at the core of the Ripper remains a story of sexual violence that, in itself, is one that is too often overlooked by those who wish to capitalise on the Ripper's name. This is not a recent phenomenon, but rather a continuation of the narratives and tropes that have helped construct the Ripper and his environment as part of a mythical London space which is both Gothic and timeless. Such narratives have not only continued through the community of Ripperology, they have been expanded to a greater public audience. The power of these narratives is then transferred in museum exhibits, which often contribute to the romance and the myth of the Ripper, rather than illustrated the dreadful nature of his crimes. By doing this, the victims in said exhibitions are often left to be little more than fossils, frozen in the time of death and with little in the way of individualism or humanity. It is little wonder that the founder of the Five Martyrs of Whitechapel Tour, Austin Harney, said to *The Guardian* "Who was Jack the Ripper - who cares? It's the victims who died that should be remembered" (4th of August 2015).

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Contributor Details

Matthew Thompson is in the final stages of PhD candidature at the Australian National University. His thesis concerns the effect that Ripperology and the constructions of Jack the Ripper have had on the popular culture landscape of Neo-Victorianism. He has also completed an Honours degree on the Party Political Rifts of the Nikita Khrushchev Era, and obtained a Masters degree in Contemporary Media Coverage of the Ripper Crimes, both from the University of Queensland.

E-mail: matthew.thompson@uqconnect.edu.au

SARAH BROWN

Lee University

The Ideal Gothic Romance: Landscapes, Heroines, and Villains in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

ABSTRACT

This article examines Canadian author Margaret Atwood's views regarding present day societal issues such as the world's tendency to repeat the mistakes of its history. It traces her views largely through her visionary novel The Handmaid's Tale, which it claims as proof of history's cyclical nature by careful analysis of its comparison to the Gothic literary genre. It also connects her views with personal statements of her literary influences, influences that are almost entirely writers of the Victorian and Gothic era, and her opinions on our modern world. The article seeks to examine Atwood's novel through a Gothic lens, confirming its implication that modern society is merely a recycling of the past by illustrating this recurrent pattern within a dystopian construct. The novel contains a society revolving around the guidelines of past societies, and more specifically, societies from the Gothic era. Evidence from other Gothic novels conveys that our world (and Atwood's world of Gilead in The Handmaid's Tale) thrives from the reassertion of past principles, principles that recur throughout time. A combined analysis of these Gothic works and Atwood's novel The Handmaid's Tale, as well as the application of Atwood's ideas of historical repetition to the modern world, reveals that her beliefs may very well be true.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, Dystopia, Gothic, Romance, History

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is often discussed as both a utopian and dystopian novel that represents the direction many societies are steadily reaching.⁷ Infertility is rampant in the fictitious city of Gilead due to pollutant chemicals and birth control, and to Atwood, this misery is the fate of our future. Atwood claims, "I write as if I've lived a lot of things I haven't lived" (Morris 1994). Indeed, her creation of Gilead – its government, its strict guidelines for society, and its disturbing depiction of our future – reflect some issues contemporary to Atwood at the time, including political unrest and feminist movements (and within that, concern over abortion rights), but the city portrays far more than that. Atwood must have a form of inspiration for such a distinct idea, and in an interview in 1994, Atwood briefly alludes to a few female writers she admires when she claims:

There was a period in my early career that was determined by the images of women writers I was exposed to—women writers as genius suicides like Virginia Woolf. Or genius recluses like Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti. Or doomed people of some sort, like the Brontës, who both died young (Morris 1994).

All of these writers are somewhat combined into the novel's main character, the handmaid Offred, who, as the solitary imparter of information, is quite the narrator herself; in fact, she has the authorial voice throughout *The Handmaid's Tale*. She contemplates suicide several times in the novel, is forced into an ascetic lifestyle, and is aware that her fate or "doom" is an outcast's life dwindling away in the toxic waste of the outlands if she is unable to procreate. Offred, in one of the many brief moments of nostalgia she indulges in, even describes herself pre-Gilead as "a refugee from the past, and like other refugees I go over the customs and habits of being I've left or been forced to leave behind me" (Atwood 1986, 227). Here, she is not only referencing her carefree pre-Gilead lifestyle, but also her identity as a historically generalized 'refugee' as well. Atwood's confirmation of her admiration for writers such as Woolf, Dickinson, and Rossetti is evidence of her inspiration from nineteenth-century literature. Although critics usually consider *The Handmaid's Tale* a dystopian novel inspired by Atwood's recognition of birthrate problems in the 1970s, few critics have analyzed Atwood's discussions on her motivation for the novel or the novel's similarities to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, or more specifically, Gothic literature.⁸ An innovative look at *The Handmaid's Tale* using Atwood's own literary role models and the novel's own resemblance to Gothic works provides a unique perspective on the novel, while also providing a newfound appreciation for Atwood's rebellion against the anxiety of influence. Instead of being

⁷ Refer to Mary Elizabeth Theis's *Mothers and Masters in Contemporary Utopian and Dystopian Literature* and Gregory Claeys's *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* for further information on these genres.

⁸ See Glenn Deer's "*The Handmaid's Tale: Dystopia and the Paradoxes of Power*" and Fiona Tolan's "*Feminist Utopia and Questions of Liberty: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale as Critique of Second Wave Feminism*" for examples of dystopian readings of the novel. In Mervyn Rothstein's interview, Atwood claims, "I started noticing that a lot of the things I thought I was more or less making up were now happening".

hindered by the writers she admires, Atwood uses her literary influences as inspiration to creatively construct a dystopian novel that significantly resembles features of Gothic literature. By revealing Atwood's true literary influences and the Gothic results of these influences in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, readers are able to visualize the world of Gilead and its characters as a Gothic tale that reflects the mistakes of the past while remaining conscious of society's present movement towards an even further descent into history's cyclical nature.

Critics of *The Handmaid's Tale* take several different approaches, few of which see the novel through a Gothic perspective within a historically cyclical society.⁹ Lauren Maxwell, author of *Romantic Revisions in Novels from the Americas: Specters of US Empire in Atwood's Fiction*, believes "Atwood insists that Gilead evolves from within the framework of US history," and this statement, though it only takes into account the American historical elements of the novel, is the epitome of what most critics of *The Handmaid's Tale* believe (Maxwell 2013, 58). Other critics take a more feminist approach and believe the novel "comes to satirically depict a dystopian society that has unconsciously and paradoxically met certain feminist aims," which refers to the feminist movements taking place in the 1970s; however, most critical discussion tends to focus on the dystopian aspects of the novel (Tolan 2007, 144). Indeed, the guidelines of the Gileadean government hope to correct the mistakes of the past and therefore support Maxwell's claim. Even the Commander complains of contemporary society's cheap sexual frivolity, telling Offred, "[t]hat was part of it, the sex was too easy [...] You know what they were complaining about the most? Inability to feel" (Atwood 1986, 210). Critics often use scenes such as this one to illustrate how Atwood's creation of Gilead is an example of the sterile, patriarchal direction the United States will likely face in the future. This conclusion is likely reached from Atwood's inclusion of a quote from Jonathon Swift's *A Modest Proposal* on the epigraph page of *The Handmaid's Tale*, which says:

But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal . . . (Atwood 1986, epigraph).

Like Swift, Atwood is enervated by North American incompetence, and she is especially disturbed by the carelessness that is taking place in the 1970s. Yet some critics seem unsettled by this somewhat simple explanation, such as David Ketterer. He also predominantly focuses on the dystopian features of the novel, and claims:

Atwood cannot have intended *The Handmaid's Tale* only as the typical dire dystopian warning or call to rebellion if she envisages Gilead either passing

³ Refer to Nathalie Cooke's *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion* for analysis of the Gothic in Atwood's works, in which she claims there is "a dark strain in Atwood's writing. It is often described as the 'gothic' strain of her work – its fascination with ambiguous characterization, eerie settings, and the evocation of terror, to cite the key characteristics of the gothic aesthetic" (11). Coral Ann Howells *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* similarly explores Atwood and the Gothic.

away naturally in the fullness of time or being dramatically overthrown (Ketterer 1989, 212).

Although the novel is undoubtedly a futuristic tale, it does not exclusively resemble the features of a typical dystopian novel; in fact, the layout of Gilead and the “love triangle” between Offred, the Commander, and Nick his assistant indicates more nineteenth-century Gothic characteristics than those of dystopian fictions. Atwood uses a society that mirrors a Gothic literary work in order to prove that through historical circulation, humanity will only repeat the mistakes of the past; however, she echoes and remodels this concept by subtly emphasizing the need for optimism, even in the bleakness of Gilead, and critics have not thoroughly explored this topic. Atwood agrees with this statement regarding the anxiety of influence and explains in an interview, “[e]ven metafiction has its eighteenth-century antecedents [...] So no technique is really that new” (Morris 1994). Her novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* exemplifies this reuse of Gothic and Victorian literary techniques as well as society’s recurrent imitations of the past, even in a twentieth-century novel set in the future.

A brief overview of the history of Gothic literature and what it entails will provide a systematic approach to Atwood’s use of Gothic characteristics in the novel. Most critics associate Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* as the origin of the Gothic novel, whose story begins under the pretenses of realism until Prince Conrad is crushed by a falling helmet, and Manfred, “beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers” (Walpole 1811, 5). This scene heralded the supernatural elements, the gloomy castles, family curses, and grotesque events of the Gothic novels that followed, such as Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, which were indebted to Walpole’s work and the rise of the Gothic Romance at the same time.¹⁰ The creation of the Gothic genre intersected with the wave of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century and the rise of Victorianism midway through the nineteenth century. Romantic elements are common in Gothic novels, such as the power of the imagination and a strong sense of personification, individuality, and emotion from the characters.¹¹ The combination of Gothic and Romantic conventions was inevitable and Carol Davison, author of *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764-1824*, believes “it would be extremely difficult to disentangle the Gothic from Romanticism, given their intense and intricate interfacing” during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century (Davison 2009, 188). This blend of literary genres continues to resurface today as writers cannot help but be influenced by literary geniuses of the past. By using such

¹⁰ See Michael Gamer’s *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation*, where he claims “the reception of gothic writing [...] played a fundamental role in shaping many of the ideological assumptions [...] that we have come to associate with ‘romanticism’” (2).

¹¹ Refer to James Watt’s *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832*, where he proposes most “works which literary history has classified as ‘Gothic’ actually described themselves by way of the larger category of ‘romance’” (3).

literary elements of the past that inspired her, Atwood creates a futuristic, dystopian, and Gothic Romance tale that emphasizes the recycling of history in her contemporary novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The Gothic novel, as first envisioned by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, is often considered mere medieval mimicry, and, in the modern literary world, is too often thought of as an outdated, lackluster, or overdone convention.¹² It no longer excites because readers know exactly what to expect – a maiden in distress and a knight in shining armor. Gothic literature scholar Robert Geary describes this expectation as one where “the sensitive maiden [is] helplessly trapped in castle, dungeon, or vault and beset by some depraved and energetic tormentor” (Geary 1992, 4). Indeed, there are novels that portray stories such as these, like Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where the blissfully ignorant Catherine Morland must be driven away from Gothic fantasies and the meek Jane Eyre falls for a man who holds a ‘madwoman in the attic’ of Thornfield Hall. And yet, a Gothic novel has the ability to captivate its reader unlike any other form of fiction through its intrigue of the unknown, madness, unrequited romance, and illicit love. Contemporary authors like Atwood have found a way to incorporate traditional Gothic literary techniques into modern day fiction that offer both a creative story and a story that is still largely influenced by the literature of the past. Vijay Mishra calls this approach an “apocalyptic narrative” in his book *The Gothic Sublime*, and he believes these types of novels “portray a world exhausted and otiose, anxious about itself and wary of any further participation” (Mishra 1994, 157). By viewing the Gothic as a transfiguration between reality and fantasy, Mishra creates a contemporary perspective for postmodern works that integrate Gothic characteristics. Indeed, *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a city quite similar to Mishra's description and as I aim to show exemplifies it. Gilead is a seemingly sheltered city, but through Offred's eyes there is always a sense of tension and apprehension as to what horror could happen next. When she and fellow handmaid Ofglen finally get to look into each other's eyes (which have been blinkered by their compulsory headdresses), she feels “risk [...] in the air, between [them], where there was none before. Even this meeting of eyes holds danger” (Atwood 1986, 167-168). Observing these “apocalyptic” and Gothic elements in Atwood's novel will provide a fresh insight into the anxiety of influence writers face within contemporary literature, and of how Atwood's construction of Gilead stresses such an anxious emulation of past societies.

Gothic literature has several prominent characteristics, but perhaps the one that influences the reader the most is the setting – usually dismal, daunting, and immersed in atmospheric tension. When asked about her literary influences in a 1988 interview, Atwood replies, “I was trained as a Victorianist; that was my field of

¹² See Kelly Hurley's *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* for discussion of the different forms of the Gothic, in which Hurley writes the “last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the re-emergence of the Gothic as a significant literary form in Great Britain, after its virtual disappearance in the middle of the century” (4).

study” (VanSpanckeren and Castro 1988, 232). Indeed, as an admirer of the Brontë sisters, Atwood admits to being influenced by the Victorian era, which intertwined with the popular production of Gothic literature as well. In both Victorian literature and Gothic literature, the reader experiences a form of imprisonment through the setting as the characters try to find their way out of it. VanSpanckeren and Castro claim this trick is made “often through images of enclosure: a fountain sealed up, an enclosed garden, a walled city,” or in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the walled city of Gilead (ibid, 50). Offred simply refers to it as “the Wall,” (the capital W certainly emphasizes its importance) and it has many purposes in Gilead other than forcibly confining its residents. Offred describes it as “a hundred years old too; or over a hundred, at least,” and as she gazes at it, she sees its invisible yet ominous warning, and knows the “precautions are for those trying to get out” (Atwood 1986, 31). In this scene, Atwood portrays the Wall as a cautionary and almost daring prison barrier. Like many Gothic settings, the Wall is used as both enforced protection and a challenge for the character to overcome. Therefore, when Offred sees the executed men’s bodies hanging from hooks embedded within the Wall, she knows she is “supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall” (ibid, 32). Offred, however, knows how the Wall and its hanging bodies are supposed to make her feel fear, but she rebels against this feeling. She believes the men have “come here from the past,” and she feels determined to challenge the city of Gilead (ibid, 33). She later comes across a small church that not only reminds her of the medieval past and how Gilead is simply a recreation of it, but it also contains paintings inside that resemble the Gothic era. Offred describes the church as “hundreds” of years old and the day as “sedate[d],” but she notices the graveyard before anything else with its “old gravestones [...] weathered, eroding, with their skull and crossed bones [...] to remind us of the passing of mortal time” (ibid, 31). This scene, as well as the church, is strangely reminiscent of a landscape from Gothic fiction. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, an unquestionably Gothic science fiction novel, Victor visits the cemetery of his family and feels much the same way as Offred. Victor even claims, “the scene would have been solemn and affecting even to an uninterested observer” (Shelley 1818, 192). It is his survivor’s guilt, however, that most resembles Offred’s reaction to the graves. She refers to them as her “ancestors,” and looks upon them as if she wished she were in their place and they in hers (Atwood 1986, 31). Victor, too, tells himself that they “were dead, and I lived” as he looms over his family’s gravestones (Shelley 1818, 192). Both characters feel a sense of survivor’s guilt, remorse for being alive while others are not, but more importantly, the church and the cemetery in *The Handmaid’s Tale* echo the function of such Gothic elements in Gothic fiction as well. The old paintings Offred knows are inside are “of women in long somber dresses, their hair covered by white caps, and of upright men, darkly clothed and unsmiling” (Atwood 1986, 31). These paintings are not only Gothic, but they’re also a somber reminder to Offred that Gilead is a recreation of the Puritan period in American history and are a reflection of such past societies who are represented within them. Though the Giladean government’s rhetoric argues that they have created a safer world for women, they have only reestablished a Gothic society where women are suppressed.

The Commander's home, to which Offred has little private access to other than her own room, also resembles a Gothic place of captivity; Offred even notices the property was once "late Victorian [...] a family house" (ibid, 9). The house now is not a typical home buzzing with activity, rather Offred describes it as somewhat of a haunting maze. George Haggerty, author of *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*, claims that "space is always threatening and never comfortable in the Gothic novel," and since Offred is forced into a life of minimalism, she sees her empty room in much the same way (Haggerty 2010, 20). Atwood begins the novel, in fact, with Offred's frank explanation of her disturbingly dull room. She associates almost every part of it with death as she scrutinizes its features, observing "[t]here must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to," and "I know why there is no glass [...] It's those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself" (Atwood 1986, 8). This introduction to Offred's world is certainly a cheerless one, but like many Gothic settings, the unembellished room leaves an unsettling and confusing impact on the reader. By identifying every element of the room as an opportunity for suicide, Offred depicts a space that not only haunts her with the idea of suicide, but also haunts the reader with its resemblance to such a Gothic space. Another disturbing part of the Commander's household is the hallway mirror, which Offred has a particular fascination with every time she walks past it to her room. She first describes it as "round, convex, a pier glass, like the eye of a fish, and [herself] in it like some distorted shadow" (ibid, 9). It seems to grab her attention every time she walks by, and later in the book is drawn once again to its strange shape. It makes her face "distant and white and distorted," and the mirror itself "bulges outward like an eye under pressure" (ibid, 49). This feature of the Commander's home projects an eeriness that Offred cannot avoid, nor can she avoid attempting to look at herself in its alluring reflection. Mirrors are symbols found frequently in the Gothic novel, though they often convey supernatural elements. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Jane finds herself enamored with mirrors much like Offred. When her aunt, Mrs. Reed, finds fault with her and she is sent into a room she believes is haunted, Jane is struck by the "looking-glass," where "all looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality" (Brontë 1847, 13). She later finds the mirror in Thornfield Hall just as sinister, calling it "dark oblong glass," especially when she determines she has seen a ghostly figure in its reflection (Brontë 1847, 288). The deformed appearance of the hallway mirror in *The Handmaid's Tale* has much the same effect on Offred, and it is a noticeably Gothic feature of the Commander's decidedly Gothic home. It captivates her, but it does so through its resemblance to mirror symbolism of the Gothic genre. Atwood portrays the city of Gilead and the Commander's home as one that is heavily influenced by the Gothic era, and this influence proves that Gilead's landscape is only a mirror of the Gothic landscape in such works.

The house is an inescapable obstacle for Offred, whose helplessness, determination, need for affection, and enforced purity patently casts her as the Gothic heroine of the novel. In their analysis of Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, VanSpanckeren and Castro recognize the novel's Gothic influences and determine

that “readers of Gothic romances thus experience, without risk, both desire for and fear of penetration, as their heroines overcome challenges without leaving the house” (Vanspanckeren and Castro 1988, 52). Although Offred’s defenselessness is not voluntary, it determines her role in the novel as she resolves to find escape, and is later saved, or perhaps destroyed, by her mysterious lover, Nick (the reader is not told which). Since she is forced into a life with little to no genuine human interaction, Offred, like the typical Gothic heroine, desires nothing more than to be with someone. In the beginning of her narrative, she immediately describes this craving when she says, “I hunger to touch something, other than cloth or wood. I hunger to commit the act of touch” (Atwood 1986, 11). Despite Offred’s determination to find a way out, the tyrannical forces of the Commander’s home restrain her and she can therefore only continue to comply with her role as Gileadean handmaid, obligated to offer herself sexually to the Commander because of her rare fertility in a barren society. VanSpanckeren and Castro describe the Gothic heroine as “show[ing] independence and courage,” but “the pattern allows her to do very little for herself” (VanSpanckeren and Castro 1988, 48). Offred exemplifies this powerlessness throughout the book, but it is always especially apparent when she realizes she does not have control over her own body, or even have the power to end her own life. As she examines the bathroom, she tells the reader in the early days of the new Gileadean society of handmaids, “[t]here were incidents in bathrooms at first: there were cuttings, drownings” (Atwood 1986, 62). Of course, there are no such dangerous materials available for her now. In this scene, however, the reader is solemnly reminded of Offred’s impotent life. She remembers Aunt Lydia, the cruel government instructor telling her handmaids in training that, “in a bathroom, in a bathtub, you are vulnerable” as Offred steps into a bathtub herself (ibid, 62). This bathtub not only represents her vulnerability at the hands of Gileadean society, but it also represents a private place of momentary mental escape for her, where she can reminisce about her past self.

Gothic heroines often face similar experiences of fantastical mental escape. In Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, Austen parodies the Gothic novel and the Gothic heroine through her foolish character Catherine Morland, and much like Offred, Catherine has a tendency to daydream during her time alone. She knows her imagination is one of her many faults, but because of her love for Gothic novels, she sees *Northanger Abbey* as a castle resonant with ghosts and secrets. As she listens to the storm inside of her room, Catherine thinks, “these were characteristic sounds,” and “they brought to her recollection of a countless variety of dreadful situations and horrid scenes” (Austen 1817, 330). She later succumbs to her inquisitive nature and starts searching her room for any signs of mysteries. After she is rudely forced to leave the Abbey because her inquisitive nature leads her to a forbidden room, she chastises herself for her curiosity, saying, “[n]othing could now be clearer than the absurdity of her recent fancies” (Austen 1817, 342). Offred is also frequently susceptible to the curiosities of her mind, much like Catherine. She, too, searches her room for anything from the past. Because her nights are a time of complete solitude, she “decide[s] to explore the room [...] not hastily, then, like a hotel room, wasting

it" (Atwood 1986, 51). She, unlike Catherine, does discover remnants from a previous inhabitant, a fellow handmaid to the Commander. Scratched into the baseboard, Offred finds the phrase "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*", which in English means, "Don't let the bastards grind you down" (ibid, 52). In this message, Offred has yet again discovered and recognized a piece of the past through her curious mind as the Gothic heroine, feeling like she is "communing with her, this unknown woman" from the past, she believes this message "was intended for whoever came next" (ibid, 52). Through this ominous finding, Atwood is commenting on the cyclical nature of Gilead's society. Though it ventures to create a community free of complications, the determined and intrigued Gothic heroine, Offred, discovers a message that proves Gilead is haunted by the past. Offred's constant referral to her helplessness and her fanciful (and morbid) imagination only affirms her persona as Gothic heroine in the novel. Her weakness cries for the aid of a hero as the male force of the Commander suppresses and imprisons her, like Gileadean society. Atwood, like Austen, uses her female protagonist to echo the characteristics of the Gothic heroine from the eighteenth century and to suggest that, despite Gilead's rhetorical claim to protect women, it is simply reinforcing the paranoias of the past.

In the tyrannical society of Gilead, the Commander is at the peak of the patriarchal organization and he, through his ownership of Offred and enforcement of her secret and forbidden nightly visits to play Scrabble, represents the Gothic lord of the manor and the evil force that confines her to his will. As an older, seemingly physically nonviolent yet untrustworthy male figure, the Commander is strangely reminiscent of the mysterious aristocratic villain typically seen in Gothic romances. When he indirectly demands Offred's presence privately, she is immediately fearful and unsure because she is aware of his total authority over her. After she hears the Commander's wish to see her alone, she "feel[s] like the word *shatter*," but she also has a sense of "eagerness" as well (Atwood 1986, 103, 138). When the night finally arrives for her first secret meeting with the Commander, the scene portrays suspense and tension, but the Commander's supremacy is evident. In fact, the scene almost perfectly mirrors the well-known encounter between Jane and Mr. Rochester in perhaps one of the most notable Gothic Victorian novels, *Jane Eyre*. Atwood not only admits to being a Victorianist, but she also asked an interviewer, "Are you familiar with Charlotte Brontë at all?", as she discussed the ending of her novel *Lady Oracle* (VanSpanckeren and Castro 1988, 220). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the first thing Offred notices as she meekly enters the Commander's private office is "a black leather chair" and "a fireplace without fire in it" (Atwood 1986, 137). With a dimly lit, intimidating, and darkly lavish setting hiding the withdrawn Commander, this scene is instantly recognizable as characteristically Gothic. During Jane and Mr. Rochester's first intense encounter in *Jane Eyre*, the atmosphere is acutely similar. One of the first objects Jane observes is an "immense easy-chair at the fireside" and "everything was still" (Brontë 1817, 266, 269). The Commander's initial greeting, which is curt and unexpected, is also comparable to Mr. Rochester's. The Commander orders Offred "pleasantly enough" to "[c]lose the door behind you"

before he attempts any other kind of conversation in an attempt to promptly exert his authority over his prisoner like a true Gothic villain (Atwood 1986, 137). Then, with what Offred discerns as “irritation,” he tells her to sit and “pulls a chair out for [her]” (ibid, 137). Atwood almost directly parallels this scene with the one between Jane and Mr. Rochester, because Mr. Rochester instantly tells Jane to “come forward; be seated here” and “drew a chair near his own” for her, commanding her to “sit down exactly where [he] placed it” (Brontë 1817, 267). Though Jane and Mr. Rochester proceed with intellectual conversation (and later fall desperately in love with one another) unlike the awkward Scrabble game that later commences between Offred and the Commander, the similarities between these two scenes cannot be ignored; however, this difference confirms Atwood’s exceptional ability to show how the future here is but a replication of the past. Atwood clearly allows her love for Victorian literature and Gothic authors such as Charlotte Brontë to influence her writing of *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The Commander as the Gothic villain affirms that Gilead’s attempt at change the world is merely a reflection of former authoritarian societies. Not only does Offred resemble the private and reserved nature of Jane Eyre, but the Commander also has a strong likeness to the overbearing Mr. Rochester as well in Brontë’s popular Gothic novel, and fulfills the Gothic villain stereotype often drawn from Gothic literature, while also posing as an intriguing foil to Offred’s romantic hero, Nick.

The attraction between Nick and Offred begins at an early stage in the text, though it is seen through non-verbal communication – a look, a whistle, his “boot [...] touching [Offred’s] foot,” and their forbidden lust is what makes Nick the Gothic hero in this tale (Atwood 1986, 81). Towards the end of the novel when Offred, like many Gothic heroines, grows despondent in her escape plans, Nick, “the ambiguous, delinquent, dangerous and therefore more sexually attractive younger man of inferior social position,” not only meets Offred’s sexual needs, but he also represents her salvation (Maxwell 2013, 41). Since Offred cannot communicate with anyone other than the Marthas (who are equally suppressed house-maids), when Serena Joy, the Commander’s barren wife, suggests she begin sleeping with Nick to have a better chance of getting pregnant for her, the liberation of the heroine finally begins. Driven by the prohibition of their attraction, Offred “went back to Nick. Time after time” and “t[old] him things [...] about Moira, about Ofglen,” and “ma[de] of him an idol” (Atwood 1986, 270). For Offred, Nick is a tempting escape that captivates her and she quickly sets him up as her savior. Nick, on the other hand, remains inscrutable and mysterious like a true Gothic lover. VanSpanckeren and Castro believe that in most Gothic tales, “the villain and hero’s identities are confused until the penultimate moment,” and both Offred and the reader are apprehensive of Nick’s character during their love affair (VanSpanckeren and Castro 1988, 48). Offred feels he is “indifferent to most of what [she] ha[s] to say,” but later confirms that it would be “impossible to think that anyone for whom [she] feel[s] such gratitude could betray [her]” (Atwood 1986, 270). Indeed, Offred more strongly feels the dependence and she, as the forcibly sheltered Gothic heroine, releases the emotion she is forbidden to evoke during her daily duties servicing the Commander

on her nightly romances with Nick. In Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one of the first Gothic novels written by a female author, the protagonist, Emily Aubert, becomes similarly entranced with Signor Montoni, though she cannot understand why. She, too, is hesitant of Montoni's mysterious character. She claims to have known, "indeed, that she had little reason to love Montoni, but could scarcely have believed her[self] capable of such perfect apathy" (Radcliffe 1794, 292). Offred battles the same emotions during her dangerous secret trysts with Nick. She often questions herself about her strange but powerful need to be with him. She even asks herself, much like Emily, "how have I come to trust him like this, which is foolhardy in itself?" (Atwood 1986, 270). When Offred finally meets with her fate after being discovered, however, Nick ultimately becomes either her Gothic hero or her Gothic executioner, the reader is left unsure which. After seeing the black van outside of her window, Offred accepts her fatal outcome until "Nick [...] pushes open the door, flicks on the light" (ibid, 293). She immediately assumes it was he who gave her away, but he tells her the secret code-phrase of the political rebels, "[i]t's Mayday. Go with them," and "calls [her] by [her] real name" (ibid, 293). After so much turmoil and uncertainty, she wants to believe in this opportunity for liberation. So too does the reader, but Offred's story, and Nick's identity as the potential Gothic hero, is never resolved. Signor Montoni's trustworthiness is comparably questioned in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where he later imprisons Emily in order to attain the wealth and estate of Udolpho. Radcliffe describes "the character of Montoni" as having frequent "instances of duplicity," where the characters suspect the candor of his nature (Radcliffe 1794, 299). Nick's similarly equivocal nature only confirms his embodiment of such a Gothic character, whether it is the deceitful villain like Signor Montoni or the heroic rescuer. Nevertheless, Atwood uses this ambiguity to perpetuate the history of the Gothic tale. When Offred decides to follow Nick's advice, Offred simply "step[s] up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (Atwood 1986, 295). Whether he leads Offred to freedom or to her death, Nick represents the ideal Gothic hero with his suspicious and vague qualities and yet his ambiguity also represents the anxious inevitability of the recycling of literary motifs from the past.

Writing *The Handmaid's Tale* gave Margaret Atwood the chance to employ love for the Victorian and Gothic texts that still remain a significant part of her literary career. Even though it is a futuristic novel, this article has endeavor to show how the setting and the characters are a product of Atwood's literary influences. The Gothic techniques that are on display in this novel draw attention to how writers let works of the past inspire the works of the future. Atwood not only exemplifies the brilliance and the success that comes with letting literary influences guide the writing process, but she also exemplifies the exceptionality and uniqueness of her work by incorporating the old with the new in innovative ways. The city of Gilead, the Gothic heroine Offred, the mysterious and villainous Commander, and the secretive savior Nick draw the reader into the true Gothic machinery that is evident in this novel; however, they are also evidence of Atwood's portrayal of a future heavily influenced by the consequences of the past. In a 2015 interview, Atwood

states: "Hope is among a number of things that are part of the human toolkit" (Finn 2015). Although her fictitious city, Gilead, is governed with strict regulations that purport to build a safer environment for humanity by returning to the traditions of the past, Atwood is issuing a warning against such practices by illustrating Gilead's serious faults through her protagonist, Offred. Despite all of its order and control, the sheltered city of Gilead is nothing more than an imitation of similarly misguided authoritarian societies in history that failed. However, Atwood ends her novel with a vague sense of hope, that perhaps the world will be able to recognize its inability to deviate from the faults of its past and be able to prevent a Gileadean societal structure from forming in the future.

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Contributor Details

Sarah Brown is a graduate from Lee University of Cleveland, Tennessee, where she attained a Bachelors degree in English Literature. She presented a version of this paper at the Sigma Tau Delta 2016 International Convention in Minneapolis. This is her first publication in an academic journal. Her research interests lie primarily in Gothic literature, contemporary horror, and science fiction. She hopes to utilize her research skills in the corporate sphere, and possibly further her study of Gothic Literature in graduate school in the future.

E-mail: sbrown14@leeu.edu

JOANNE WATKISS

Leeds Beckett University

“The Trials of Briony”: Gothic Desire in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*

ABSTRACT

*This article focuses on specific Gothic tropes such as the uncanny and the abject through metafiction and the haunted psyche of Briony Tallis. As a text that engages with the doubling of fiction and reality, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* offers a Gothic experience of reading through the conflicted psyche of the protagonist. This article charts the haunted self through repression, abjection and trauma that are evident through Briony’s projection of her emotions onto other characters in the novel. Through such metafictional play, Briony is evidently haunted by her own desire, which manifests itself as abject in her traumatic witnessing of two sexual encounters in twenty-four hours. Through her fears of becoming the pursued Gothic heroine, Briony is subject to extreme self-policing of her sexuality, which results in the emergence of those desires in a coded, uncanny form. Through psychoanalytic and trauma theory, this article suggests a renewed reading of McEwan’s novel to consider the haunted psyche of his protagonist through her abject narrative of desire, “The Trials of Arabella”.*

Keywords: Gothic, Desire, Repression, Abjection, Trauma

Hailed as his masterpiece, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* has been subject to several academic readings. Brian Finney’s (2004) important reading examines the novel as a work of metafiction, through its heightened awareness of the process of writing. His

essay examines how the writer protagonist, Briony Tallis, parallels the fictional realm with that of the real world. Several other interpretations of *Atonement* have emerged in the last ten years, such as Pilar Hidalgo's (2006) article which considers the alignment of history and fiction in the novel through the process of storytelling and cultural memory. Peter Mathews (2006) work examines the place of secrets in the narrative, focusing on Briony's guilt as a debt to be repaid. Kathleen D'Angelo's (2009) piece suggests that *Atonement* is concerned with the relationship between readers and text, privileging the reader's interpretation and delivery of atonement for Briony. Similarly, Martin Jacobi's (2011) influential article examines the dangers of misreading in his essay on the novel, with the death of Robbie and Cecilia as the main example. In his view, there is no definitive evidence in the novel of their deaths. Instead, he argues that the reader has imposed this reading on the novel through their expectation of Robbie and Cecilia as tragic lovers. Charles Pastoor's (2014) article argues that Briony is depicted as a deity-like figure, whose writings position her as the ultimate authority in the novel. However, no reading has yet attempted to align this novel with the genre of the Gothic, and so this piece will attempt to address this critical gap.

This article focuses on specific Gothic tropes such as the uncanny and the abject through the metafictional play of the narrative and the haunted psyche of Briony Tallis. *Atonement* explores the uncanny tensions when reality is blurred with fiction, as Briony's reality is distorted by her fictional writings to such an extent that the individuals around her become characters, paralleled in her narration of reality with those in her fictional play, "The Trials of Arabella". Such a doubling permits the projection of her own desires and fears onto others, as her narrative functions as a mirror that distorts but also acts out her own conflicted psyche. Through a focus on the psychological conflict of an adolescent, *Atonement* charts the Gothic interest in the haunting of the psyche. One of the key concerns of Contemporary Gothic fiction is that of a psychological or internal haunting. As I have discussed in *Gothic Contemporaries: The Haunted Text* (Watkiss 2012), contemporary novels increasingly depict the psyche as a haunted space. Such readings have emerged through the growth of psychoanalysis as a literary theory that shifts ghosts from an external force to an internal one. Through this approach, representations of literary haunting have also become studies of psychology and characterisation. In Briony's case, she is haunted by her own repressed sexuality, and so *Atonement* can be read as a trauma narrative, exploring the distressing effects of a convoluted sexual identity. As a narrative focused on Briony's misinterpretation of sexual intercourse for rape, *Atonement* charts her growth and desire for atonement throughout her life as she condemns an innocent man, Robbie, to prison. Through psychoanalytic and trauma theory, this article suggests a renewed reading of McEwan's novel to consider the haunted psyche of his protagonist through her abject narrative of desire, "The Trials of Arabella".

Gothic fiction has always explored the complexity of sexual identity, particularly through the figure of the Gothic heroine, "a central figure of the

persecuted maiden who is [typically] entrapped by a male tyrant in a labyrinthine castle" (Milbank 2009, 120). As Ellis has pointed out, the classic Gothic novel was frequently "concerned with violence done to familial bonds that is frequently directed against women" (Ellis 1989, 3). As a character immersed in literary influence, Briony assumes the role of the Gothic heroine, fearful of the potential of her own desire and the desire of others, and so her comprehension of desire becomes Gothic. In doing so, she aligns herself with characters like Isabella in *The Castle of Otranto*, and Antonia in the *The Monk*: women pursued by aggressive tyrannical males with lustful and overpowering intent. As Alison Milbank suggests,

in the female tradition, the male aggressor becomes the villain whose authoritative reach as patriarch, abbot or despot seeks to entrap the heroine, usurps the great house, and threatens death or rape (Milbank 1989, 121).

Like Ann Radcliffe's heroines Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Julia in *A Sicilian Romance* who must escape the tyrant figure, Briony is alert to the dangers of being pursued by men. Such an anxiety of sexuality is projected onto other characters in the novel, as her sister, Cecilia, and cousin, Lola, are cast as similar Gothic heroine figures in need of rescue, with her sister's lover, Robbie, cast as lustful villain. Cecilia's reading of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1752), a novel concerned with a young woman's struggle and ultimate failure to resist patriarchal oppression and rape, is hugely significant, as the "references to the eighteenth-century, and references to specific kinds of reading, appear from the book's earliest chapters, where McEwan presents Cecilia and Robbie as readers of eighteenth-century novels" (D'Angelo 2009, 90). As a story of a young girl lured away from her home by a villain who rapes her, subsequently ruining her future, this novel is a cautionary tale that chimes with the plot of "The Trials of Arabella":

Richardson, then, does not invite his readers to participate in shaping the novel's meaning; instead, his novel about the sexual threats that face even the most virtuous women serves to warn readers (ibid, 90).

Therefore, after witnessing her sexual encounter with Robbie, Cecilia becomes Clarissa in Briony's eyes: raped and with a ruined future, hence why neither Robbie nor Cecilia have a future in the narrative. Similarly, the genre of Gothic fiction is clearly gestured towards by McEwan's epigraph from *Northanger Abbey*. As critics such as Mathews have pointed out, this extract directs the reader towards a parodic take on the classic Gothic fictions of the 1790s. Read as a satire of the Gothic genre, Austen's narrative presents the reader with classic Gothic tropes, such as the vulnerable heroine, Catherine Morland, and a patriarchal figure that she fears, General Tilney. However, these familiar elements are held up for mockery, and rather than incite suspense and atmosphere, the text alerts both the reader and Catherine to the dangers of aligning fictional plots with reality. "Like Austen [...] McEwan is playing with the presuppositions of his readers, luring them into making erroneous assumptions based on their expectations about the novel's theme and

genre” (Mathews 2006, 151). By drawing parallels with *Northanger Abbey*, McEwan alerts the reader to the conventions of the Gothic genre from the start.

Briony’s written narrative that is *Atonement* can be read as a parallel to her own Gothic narrative, her original play, “The Trials of Arabella”. Briony is described by her sister, Cecilia, as being “lost to her writing fantasies – what had seemed a passing fad was now an enveloping obsession” (McEwan 2001, 21). Her reality becomes fiction as she cannot distinguish between narrative and the real, a key characteristic of the Freudian experience of the Uncanny. As Freud suggests in his essay of the same name:

the writer can intensify and multiply th[e] effect [of the uncanny] far beyond what is feasible in normal experience; in h[er] stories [s]he can make things happen that one would never, or only rarely, experience in real life [...] [s]he tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it (Freud 1919, 157).

Briony’s uncanny narrative is caught between reality and fantasy, which allows her coded, repressed desires to become manifest. As with Catherine Morland’s misinterpretation of General Tilney, Briony’s misreading of Robbie’s character results in a Gothic narrative that warns of the dangers of misplacing villainy and heroism. As Jacobi points out, “Catherine and Briony look at the world as if it is a literary text, and of a particular type, they expect to see certain conventions of plot and character development” (Jacobi 2011, 66). Her repressed desires are mapped out onto the characters in her narrative, who function as representatives of herself, or Arabella, her fictional self. Freud writes that, “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious” (Freud 1915, 147: original emphasis). For Briony, her repressed desires, in particular her love for her sister’s lover, Robbie, emerges through her representation of others. Her desire is repressed not only because of Robbie’s working class background and her mother’s disapproval, but also due to Briony’s abject relationship towards her adolescent sexuality. Across Briony’s text, sexuality is repeatedly aligned with fear and criminality, and so, her anxiety manifests itself in her paranoid interpretations of the relationships she witnesses around her. Like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, Briony is absorbed in literature “using [texts] as a lens onto the everyday world around her” (Heiland 2004, 92). As Kristeva examines in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), the perversion of criminality is aligned with the abject. Therefore, for Briony, sexual intercourse is perceived as an abject, Gothic act. As Cathy Caruth suggests in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative & History*, “what causes trauma is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 1996, 61). Her shock at witnessing two sexual acts in the novel is traumatic for twelve-year-old Briony, to such an extent that she represses her own desires as criminal, which, as Caruth suggests, disrupts her development into an adult and her mind’s “experience of time”. This is supported by Mathews’ view that Briony experiences a break in her

psyche. As Kristeva points out, what results in abjection is that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva 1982, 4). For Briony, her negotiation of her own sexuality results in an alignment of desire with the abject criminal, as stressed by her repeated focus on the importance of order: “her wish for a harmonious, organised world denied her the reckless possibilities of wrongdoing” (McEwan 2001, 5). Among Kristeva’s list of embodiments of the abject are “the traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist” (Kristeva 1982, 4), all of which could be aligned with Briony’s characterisation of Robbie. Therefore, Robbie is symbolic of her own abject desire, and must be sentenced, like a Gothic villain, to a term of punishment.

A child at the start of the narrative, Briony is depicted as a naïve individual whose actions implicate her sister’s boyfriend, Robbie, in a crime he did not commit. From Briony’s account of events, Robbie violates her sister Cecilia, after sending her an obscene letter, and then rapes her cousin, Lola, for which he is punished and sent to prison on Briony’s testimony alone. However, readers later learn that it was Paul Marshall, a friend of Briony’s brother Leon, and not Robbie, who attacked Lola. As witness, Briony is placed in the authoritative position of judging Robbie’s innocence, as Lola claims she cannot recall her assailant:

though she lacks visual certainty regarding Lola’s attacker, in a good story the attack would be the work of a maniac, like the Robbie Turner she has now constructed in her mind (Jacobi 2011, 60).

Briony’s interpretation then, is a reflection of her own desires, as her condemning of Robbie is due to her repressed desire for him. In marking him as a criminal, it is however, Briony’s own desire she perceives as criminal. As Kristeva notes, “any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject” (Kristeva 1982, 4). Hence, her inappropriate desire is aligned with the illegal, the transgressive, and the Gothic.

Briony’s perception of abject desire is further suggested by her father’s absence from the household, and the suggestion that he is having an affair, which her mother is only partly conscious of: “he did not sleep at the club, and he knew that she knew this” (McEwan 2001, 148-9). As children receive their initiation to desire through their parents, the Tallis’ relationship “does not respect [the] borders, positions, rules” of marriage (Kristeva 1982, 4). As Ellis has suggested, “the frequent presence of bad parents as Gothic villains gives authors ample opportunity to hold up for criticism overindulgent or negligent mothers and indifferent or authoritarian fathers” (Ellis 1989, 82). Similarly, her brother, Leon, is judged by Briony to be debasing himself to lustful desires in his “careless succession of girlfriends” (McEwan 2001, 4). Through her writing, Briony creates her own romance narrative, which, through its autobiographical content, might also be called “The Trials of Briony.” As Caruth suggests, trauma “simultaneously defies and demand our witness” (Caruth 1996, 5), and therefore, Briony’s play can be interpreted as a desire

for her traumatic relationship with her own sexuality to be witnessed. Once the reader is aware that *Atonement* has been written by Briony, as is evident in the novel's Postscript, it becomes clear that the narrative charts her attempt to process her repressed desire by the displacement of her desire onto others. Her play that is to be performed on her brother's arrival, "The Trials of Arabella", functions as a cathartic rendering of her repressed emotions. The lead role in her play, Arabella, whose "reckless passion for a wicked foreign count is punished by ill fortune when she contracts cholera" (McEwan 2001, 3), is a projection of Briony's own self-punishment for her inappropriate desire of Robbie. As Boag points out, psychoanalytical displacement suggests that the "object of a desire might shift to another" (Boag 2012, 24). For Briony, her desires have shifted not only in terms of her own desired object, but also her own position as desiring subject:

She was not playing Arabella because she wrote the play, she was taking the part because no other possibility had crossed her mind, because that was how Leon was to see her, because she *was* Arabella (McEwan 2001, 13).

Significantly, Briony intended to perform the play to her brother Leon, an authoritative substitute for her father figure who remains absent throughout the narrative. As a moral tale, the play was "intended to inspire not laughter, but terror, relief and instruction" (ibid, 8), and so, Briony has composed her own Gothic narrative with a conservative message to reflect her own anxieties regarding desire.

As Boag reminds us, "the unpleasure leading to repression is typically also related to parental injunctions and the fear of punishment" (Boag 2012, 32). Briony's characterisation of Robbie is clearly informed by her mother, who "thought of Robbie at dinner when there had been something manic and glazed in his look" (McEwan 2001, 151). After his arrest, Emily's relief that Robbie will be removed from the house is directed towards her daughters:

Suddenly her mother's hands were pressing firmly on her shoulders and turning her towards the house, delivering her into Betty's care. Emily wanted her daughter well away from Robbie Turner (ibid, 183).

The reader also learns that Emily pursues "his prosecution with a strange ferocity" (ibid, 227). Her mother's disapproval of Robbie fuels Briony's need for atonement for her desires. That her mother disapproves of Robbie as a suitor for her daughters guides Briony's interpretation of the sexual encounter between Cecilia and Robbie as a Gothic one of violation rather than consensual intercourse. However, for the Gothic heroine, "too much innocence is hazardous, Radcliffe concludes, to a heroine's health. She needs knowledge, not protection from the truth" (Ellis 1989, xiii). In shielding her daughter, Emily enables Briony to witness villainy instead of love.

Like Briony, Arabella's "skin was pale and her hair was black and her thoughts were Briony's thoughts" (McEwan 2001, 14). However, subject to the force of Lola's persuasion, Briony is pressured into allowing her cousin to play the part, even though "Arabella, whose hair was as dark as Briony's, was unlikely to be descended from freckled parents" (ibid, 10). As Lola becomes Arabella, the meaning of the play changes as a new actress forces Briony to project her repressions and desires onto Lola. Briony acknowledges that: "it was slipping away from her, she knew, but there was nothing that she could think of to say that would bring it back" (ibid, 13-14). As Arabella, Lola is now the subject of Briony's repression, as she projects her own fears onto her cousin. After her reluctant agreement achieved through a nod of the head, Briony notes "how the tilt of a skull can change a life!" (ibid, 15). Such a dramatic statement suggests a radical shift of identity, as now it is Lola who becomes the Gothic heroine. Lola's attraction to Leon's friend, Paul, is also punished by Briony, whose representation of their first meeting is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, with Paul tempting Lola into sexual transgression. The chocolate that Paul offers Lola has a green casing like the green apple that tempted Adam and Eve. Paul's insistence that "'You've got to bite it'" (ibid, 62), has clear sexual connotations. As Lola commits the sin of lust, Briony's representation of this moment aligns Lola further with the fallen figure of Arabella.

Across the text, Briony witnesses two sexual encounters in twenty-four hours; both are misunderstood and rendered as spectacle, with only her judgement to account for them. In the library scene with Robbie and Cecilia, Briony assumes she witnesses the villain attack the Gothic heroine, Arabella, this time cast as her sister: "her immediate understanding was that she had interrupted an attack, a hand-to-hand fight" (ibid, 123). As Cecilia and Robbie become doubled with her representation of Lola and Paul, Briony interprets Cecilia and Robbie's lovemaking as rape, yet she does not report this incident to an authority figure. In contrast to Lola and Paul's sexual encounter, Briony does not declare she has witnessed anything in the library to anybody. By repressing the criminality of this event as that which she simply does not understand, Briony's judgement is heavily influenced by her own desires. Witnessing her sister with the man she loves forces Briony to interpret their love as a violation. Such an event is experienced as a trauma by Briony, hence her depiction of rape rather than love. As Caruth's definition of trauma suggests: "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event [is] often delayed" (Caruth 1996, 11). If she accepts their love as such, she must acknowledge that not only does Robbie not love her and loves her sister, her sister has betrayed her also. Therefore, Cecilia must maintain a passive position of victim, with Robbie as the dominant force. That they are in love is beyond her comprehension, and so Briony represses the significance of this event until it is repeated, when she witnesses Lola and Paul's doubled representation of sexual intercourse. As with any trauma, the experience "repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly" (ibid, 2). As Lola is only fifteen, whereas Cecilia is an adult, Briony can lay claim to Robbie's villainy of intercourse with a minor, and have him removed from the household. Robbie's "obscene" letter to

Cecilia that Briony intercepts becomes evidence of his villainy, fitting the role of her play perfectly. Such criminality is aligned with the abject as the “immoral, sinister, scheming, and [the] shady” (Kristeva 1982, 4).

For Briony, witnessing Cecilia and Robbie’s sexual encounter is traumatic as it is experienced both unexpectedly and at too young an age for her to understand the significance of the event. The fear Briony describes is the realisation that the scene is a display of her repressed desires, a revelation, as her secret, abject desire has come to light. As she reveals, “the scene was so entirely a realisation of her worst fears that she sensed that her over-anxious imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books” (McEwan 2001, 123). Her admission of imaginative projection onto the books in her father’s library defines the moment as a fictional one from her play, acted out through her sister and Robbie. Such a scene is symbolic of her own future if she persists in her inappropriate desires, and like “The Trials of Arabella”, functions in her mind as a warning. The suppression of her sexuality demonstrates that repression “involves a cognitive appraisal and anticipation of future punishing consequences” (Boag 2012, 33). This is further evident through her own performance of this scene with the police officers after Robbie has been arrested, where she is able “to show them the precise location of Robbie’s attack on Cecilia [...] Briony wedged herself in, with her back to the books to show them how her sister was positioned” (McEwan 2001, 180). In this moment, Briony places herself into the role of Arabella, the fallen heroine who acts on her desires and subsequently must seek forgiveness for them. This is the source of Briony’s atonement: not her crime of condemning Robbie, but her inappropriate desire for him. That she can “demonstrate the attacker’s stance” (ibid, 180) to show where Robbie stood indicates that the scene is of her own construction, signalling stage directions like a director on set, pointing out the transgression of sexual desire.

Briony’s Gothicisation of desire is evident through the frenzied nature of the assistance she offers to the police on Robbie’s arrest. Her interception of the letter between Robbie and Cecilia provides her with evidence of his villainy. Although she acknowledges that “it was wrong to open people’s letters” (ibid, 113), she justifies the act as “it was essential for her to know everything” (ibid, 113). As a third party, she renders a secret communication a public one as she converts the letter into public property: “[she] put the folded sheet of paper into the hands of the policeman with the face of granite” (ibid, 177). The letter is so monstrous to Briony because it is an expression of explicit desire: “with the letter, something elemental, brutal, perhaps even criminal had been introduced” (ibid, 113). The letter provides Briony with a villain for her narrative who embodies her fears and abjection of desire. What she is horrified by specifically, is Robbie’s reference to Cecilia’s vagina and his desire to perform cunnilingus. Her immediate response to the letter is that of a trauma: “the word: she tried to prevent it sounding in her thoughts, and yet it danced there obscenely” (ibid, 114). Again, she attempts to repress sexuality by halting the entry of the word into her consciousness. As Laurie Vickroy suggests, “trauma often involves a radical sense of disconnection and isolation as bonds are broken and

relationships and personal safety are put into question" (Vickroy 2012, 23). Her naivety is revealed as she remarks how,

no one in her presence had ever referred to the word's existence, and what was more, no one, not even her mother, had ever referred to the existence of that part of her to which – Briony was certain – the word referred (McEwan 2001, 114).

Her sheltered upbringing is clearly a contributing factor to Briony's abject fear of sexuality and: "the danger contained by such crudity" (ibid, 114), as she "could never forgive Robbie his disgusting mind" (ibid, 115). After giving the letter to Cecilia, Briony is uncannily elated: "never had she appeared so animated, so weirdly excited" (ibid, 111). As a Gothic villain, Briony must remove Robbie from her fictionalised future, and hence, he does not survive as a character, even beyond his prison sentence. Towards the end of the narrative we are told that Robbie was sent to war, and "died of septicaemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940" (ibid, 370). He functions as "the sacrifice, the scapegoat that restores her world to its pre-lapsarian state" (Mathews 2006, 155). In her fictional reality, Robbie embodies the Gothic tyrant, and so, like Ambrosio in *The Monk* who is punished for his transgressive behaviour by a violent death, she condemns him to an early demise.

Briony judges both sexual encounters she witnesses in the novel as inappropriate. As for Lola's encounter with Paul Marshall, Briony interprets this as rape, as Lola has cast herself as Arabella. In another example of doubling, Briony projects her own desire for an older man onto Lola, who also, the novel suggests, desires an older man. Since the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, sexual relations between adults over the age of twenty-one and individuals under the age of sixteen are illegal. Therefore, as Lola is only fifteen, Paul clearly commits a crime in his relations with a minor. After the realisation that Lola and Paul were engaging in sexual activity, Briony is "nauseous with fear and disgust" (McEwan 2001, 164). Again, her comprehension of desire is depicted as abject, inciting a bodily response such as sickness, usually aligned with a turning away from horror. As a witness to the act of sex, Briony is confronted with her fears of sexuality, and because the act takes place with a girl of a similar age, those fears are intensified. Like Arabella, who contracts cholera as punishment for her inappropriate desire, Lola is rendered bed-bound after her alleged sexual attack, rushed upstairs and "sedated by the doctor" (ibid, 176). This is an uncanny parallel to Lola's performance as Arabella in her sickbed earlier on in the narrative: "they were doing the sickbed scene, the one in which the bed-bound Arabella first receives into her garret the prince" (ibid, 55). As Meyers explores in *Femicidal Fears*, in the female-centred Gothic romance tradition,

the 'power of darkness' lies not, or not solely, in the figure of the Gothic villain-hero (who is not always combined into one figure), but rather in the heroine's *relation* to him/them as well as in her connection to another, victimized woman (Meyers 2001, 18).

Rendered immobile and absent from the ensuing discussion, Lola is passive to Briony's judgements: "her cousin's removal left Briony centre-stage" (ibid, 173). Without Lola present, Briony speaks for her cousin and determines the event as her imagination desires.

In the epilogue, Briony is seventy-seven and suffering from vascular dementia as she witnesses a performance of her play by the younger generations of the Tallis family. This time, Arabella is played by "Leon's great granddaughter, Chloe" (ibid, 368). Due to the uncanny repetition of her play, "Briony experiences a haunting retrieval of the past" (Hidalgo 2005, 89), as the play is a reminder of the trauma experienced as a child, indicative of how trauma "returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 1996, 4). The performance allows Briony's trauma narrative to finally be heard, as "for healing to take place, survivors must find ways to tell their stories and to receive some social acknowledgement if not acceptance" (Vickroy 2002, 19). Significantly, the end of *Atonement* is also the end of "The Trials of Arabella", or in my view, "The Trials of Briony".

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Contributor Details

Dr Joanne Watkiss is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Leeds Beckett University. She has published extensively on the gothic and her monograph *Gothic Contemporaries: The Haunted Text* (2012) was published with the University of Wales Press as part of the Gothic Literary Studies series. Her research focuses on contemporary literature with a particular interest in identifying gothic tropes in texts that have not previously been aligned with the genre. She is currently working on the intersection between crime fiction and the gothic in the work of Agatha Christie.

E-mail: j.watkiss@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

KERRY DEAN CARSO

State University of New York at New Paltz

Gothic Arches in America: Cooper's Cave and Nineteenth-Century Tourism in Nature

ABSTRACT

A cavern on an island in the middle of the Hudson River in Glens Falls, New York inspired James Fenimore Cooper to write The Last of the Mohicans (1826) after he visited the site as a tourist in 1824. This paper examines "Cooper's Cave" as an example of Gothic Tourism. In the novel, the cavern scene is full of Gothic dread in which the protagonists, led by Hawk-eye, seek refuge from their Huron Indian pursuers in the frightful American frontier landscape. Because of the popularity of the novel, Cooper's Cave became a tourist destination and continues to draw visitors today. The opening of the cave is naturally shaped like a ruined Gothic arch. Artists and writers in the United States conferred age on the landscape by imagining European architectural forms within the American wilderness. While the religious and spiritual implications of the Gothic arch in nature have received some scholarly attention, the question still to be explored is whether tourists perceived a more sinister edge to the American Gothic arch. When tourists experienced nature at its most sublime, were there thrills and chills such as those experienced vicariously by the readers of Gothic fiction? This article will contextualize the Gothic arch phenomenon in American visual culture within the Anglo-American tradition of Gothic literature. This study is regional, examining the upstate area of New York State, especially the Catskill Mountains and the scenery around Lake George, both within reach of middle-class tourists from more populated urban regions.

Keywords: James Fenimore Cooper, Cooper's Cave, The Last of the Mohicans, Hudson River School, Gothic Tourism

Given the non-descript appearance of the rest of the building, the entrance to the restaurant Cooper's Cave Ale Company in the upstate city of Glens Falls, New York is surprisingly kitschy. Before the square door is a wall opening that takes the shape of an ogee arch, a type of late Gothic arch with two S-curves bending to a pointed apex. Around the arch is an irregular assemblage of *trompe-l'oeil* stones painted grey to resemble the entrance to a cavern. The cavern in question is the restaurant's namesake, Cooper's Cave, located about two miles away on an island in the middle of the Hudson River in South Glens Falls. This cave was a tourist attraction even before James Fenimore Cooper (1793-1851) visited in 1824; it became more so after he featured the cavern in a famous scene in his most successful novel in the Leatherstocking series, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). The Ale Company's doorway emulates the northwest opening of the cave in a playful manner. The scene in the novel, however, is far from playful; rather, it is full of Gothic dread in which the protagonists, led by Hawk-eye, seek refuge from their Huron Indian pursuers in the frightful American frontier landscape.

Gothic-shaped arches abounded in nineteenth-century literature and visual culture. For example, Hudson River School artists imprinted the Gothic arch on the American landscape in paintings such as Thomas Cole's *Kaaterskill Falls* of 1826 (fig. 1) in which the cave behind the waterfall (a popular nineteenth-century tourist attraction in New York State's Catskill Mountains) takes the shape of a yawning Gothic arch of earth at the top of the painting. Indeed, there are numerous examples of Gothic arches in paintings of the American landscape by artists of the Hudson River School. Artists and writers imagined European architectural forms within the American wilderness in order to confer age on the landscape. While the religious and spiritual implications of the Gothic arch in nature have received some scholarly attention, the question still to be explored is whether tourists perceived a more sinister edge to the American Gothic arch (Schimmelman 1980, 47-82). When tourists experienced nature at its most sublime, were there thrills and chills such as those experienced vicariously by the readers of Gothic fiction? This essay will contextualize the Gothic arch phenomenon in American visual culture within the Anglo-American tradition of Gothic literature. A key figure in this essay is Cooper, whose untamed American wilderness, what Donald Ringe has called the "Gothic landscape," becomes the backdrop to his narratives of frontier life (Ringe 1987, 43). The cavern scene in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* is particularly Gothic. This essay will argue that the popularity of Cooper's Cave in Glens Falls is the result of two intersecting phenomena in early America: the rise of "Gothic tourism," which Emma McEvoy has defined as "tourism that is intimately connected with Gothic narrative, its associated tropes, discourses and conventions" (McEvoy 2016, 5), and the swell of cultural nationalism focused on American scenery. What brought tourists to Cooper's Cave was a desire to experience a Gothic enclosure first-hand and a longing to see the sublime Hudson River landscape Cooper described in his novel.

This study is regional, examining the upstate area of New York State, especially the Catskill Mountains and the scenery around Lake George, both within reach of middle-class tourists from more populated urban regions such as New York City. Transportation routes had expanded in the nineteenth century; there were eight lines running twenty-nine steamboats on the Hudson River by 1830, and by 1850, nearly 150 steamboats traveled along the waterway, which had become a crucial transportation artery for tourists (Schuyler 2012, 9; Dunwell 2008, 68). The history of tourism in the area has national implications. Historian David Schuyler explains that nineteenth-century American “landscape tourism” was essential to the “development of an American national identity” (Schuyler 2012, 9). Indeed, while touring New England and New York in 1806, Dr. John Gorham made explicit reference to both the pride of nationalism felt by American tourists in the early nineteenth century and also the landscape descriptions of Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe. In a letter to his fellow American, the Yale science professor Benjamin Silliman, Gorham writes:

I cannot command the pen of Mrs. Radcliffe and therefore you must not anticipate any regular long-drawn description of their beauties. How often have I wish'd that some of the narrow minded prejudiced Europeans we have both met with might be suddenly transported to some of the spots over which we passed. Were they ignorant of the country in which they were placed they would probably imagine themselves sometimes among the wild romantic scenery of Switzerland; at others, surrounded by the rich and harmonious scenes of Italy. We live in a charming country (qtd. in Brown 2012, 150).

In this period, visitors were drawn to sites of natural beauty, such as Kaaterskill Falls in the Catskills, where the Catskill Mountain House started catering to well-heeled tourists beginning in 1824, and to historic sites associated with the French and Indian War and Revolutionary War history, such as Fort William Henry and Fort Ticonderoga on Lake George. This tourist itinerary was part of a larger national interest in exploring what made the United States unique. Landscape scenery often fulfilled this desire for American exceptionalism in the nineteenth century. Visits to Kaaterskill Falls can also be categorized as literary tourism, since James Fenimore Cooper’s protagonist Natty Bumppo (or Hawk-eye) had described the falls with rapture in *The Pioneers* (1823), and the passage was often quoted in guidebooks, instructing visitors on how to react to the natural scenery around them.

The spectacular scenery of the waterfalls at Glens Falls, New York attracted visitors decades before Cooper arrived on holiday in 1824 (Holden 1917, 231). In 1798, Timothy Dwight visited the falls and declared that the “prevailing appearance here is that of sublimity,” as the water falls in “great sheets, or violent torrents” (qtd. in *ibid*, 235-36). He continued,

The wildness is extreme, the variety endless, and the beauty intense. From some pictures, which I have seen, I should believe Salvator Rosa might have exhibited this group of objects with advantage (ibid, 237).

In 1813, the *Gazetteer of the State of New York* described how the cascades flowed over the large rock islands in the river, creating “long excavations or caverns, presenting arched subterranean passages of considerable extent, evidently worn by the water” (qtd. in ibid, 239). When Cooper visited, the cave was exposed due to the seasonal low-water point (ibid, 246). Cooper was so impressed with the wild surroundings, he reportedly declared “I must place one of my old Indians here” (Franklin 2007, 435). According to his daughter Susan Fenimore Cooper, Cooper spent time studying the area closely “with a view to accurate description at a later hour” (ibid, 435). Cooper subsequently had a copy of *The Last of the Mohicans* sent to his traveling partner Edward Smith-Stanley (the future fourteenth earl of Derby and a future British prime minister), writing that the two had been there “in the caverns at Glens falls [sic], and it was there that I determined to write the book, promising him a Copy” (qtd. in ibid, 435).

As the scenery that inspired the novel, the cave at Glens Falls is at the center of the novel. Cooper’s description of the cave highlights the verticality of the fissure, calling to mind the elongated proportions of the Gothic arch in architecture:

At the farther extremity of a narrow, deep, cavern in the rock, whose length appeared much extended by the perspective and the nature of the light by which it was seen, was seated the scout [Hawk-eye], holding a blazing knot of pine (1983, 52).

Cooper has borrowed various conventions of earlier Gothic novels in the cave scene. First and foremost is the cave itself. Cave settings were prevalent in Gothic novels, “even to the point of absurdity,” according to Allen Grove (2005, 3). In his scholarly introduction to the popular anonymous British novel *The Cavern of Death* (1794), Grove highlights the popularity of caverns by listing the numerous titles featuring the words “cave” or “cavern” (ibid, 3-4). In the United States, Charles Brockden Brown employed a mysterious cave setting in his early American novel *Edgar Huntly* (1799). What make caverns particularly suitable to Gothic stories are the inherently sublime qualities of these natural spaces: dimness and obscurity, irregularity in form, and a palette naturally limited to dark colors. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke characterized the sublime as encompassing terror caused by obscurity, vastness, and power, while he associated the beautiful with pleasure and procreation. Early American painters exploited the Burkean sublime in paintings of caves. Both Washington Allston’s *Donna Mencina in the Robber’s Cavern* (1815) and Rembrandt Peale’s *The Court of Death* (1820) feature caves—mysterious, subterranean spaces where either bandits lurk or allegorical figures representing human disasters reside.

Cooper uses these elements of the Burkean sublime to great advantage in *The Last of the Mohicans*. For instance, the cave in the story has more than one outlet, and this abundance of thresholds makes the cave both eminently escapable and simultaneously penetrable (ultimately, the Hurons will indeed enter the cave). Earlier, in a particularly Radcliffean moment of suspense, we read that:

A spectral looking figure stalked from out the darkness behind the scout, and seizing a blazing brand, held it towards the further extremity of their place of retreat. Alice uttered a faint shriek, and even Cora rose to her feet, as this appalling object moved into the light (Cooper 1983, 54).

The figure is revealed to be their ally, Chingachgook, but in that moment, the indistinct spaces of the cave allow for the possibility of the intrusion of the supernatural in the form of a specter. When Duncan Heyward assures Alice that he will examine the “security of [her] fortress,” he is superficially assuaging her fears because the cave is about as safe to a young heroine as any Gothic castle. The prototype, of course, is Ann Radcliffe’s *Castle of Udolpho*, where the Gothic heroine Emily is imprisoned and confronted with any number of frightful experiences in the multitudinous chambers (Cooper’s cave likewise contains various spaces). The cave serves as a refuge from the forest haunted by Native American “savages,” but the cave is as Gothic as the rest of the wilderness. It is the transposition of the Gothic castle to the New World. As Donald A. Ringe suggests, the caves in *The Last of the Mohicans* are “the wilderness counterparts of the castles, rooms, and subterranean labyrinths familiar from Gothic fiction” (Ringe 1993, 112). Ringe rightly points out that the cave is “the classic Gothic enclosure” (Ringe 1987, 46).

The Last of the Mohicans became the subject of four paintings by Thomas Cole (1801-1848), the landscape artist who is often referred to as the “founder” of the Hudson River School of painting: *Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans,” Cora Kneeling at the Feet of Tamenund* (1827; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art); *Landscape Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans” (Cora Kneeling at the Feet of Tamenund)* (1827; Fenimore Art Museum); *Landscape Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans”* (1827; University of Pennsylvania Art Collection); and *Landscape with Figures: A Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans”* (1826; Terra Foundation for American Art) (Katz 2011). While none of the paintings take the cavern scene as their focus, the Wadsworth Atheneum’s *Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans,” Cora Kneeling at the Feet of Tamenund* (fig. 2) does feature a prominent cave towering over the minute figures of Cora and her companions, Tamenund, and the circle of Delaware tribesmen. It seems entirely plausible that Cole based the prominent cave in the Wadsworth painting, with its natural pointed arch, on Cooper’s Cave. In 1826, Cole visited the Lake George region, including Glens Falls (Parry 2001, 151). Ellwood C. Parry III speculates that Cole’s “sudden interest” in spring 1826 in painting Native Americans resulted from his having read Cooper’s *Mohicans* (149). Whether Cole visited “Cooper’s Cave” is not known, but by 1826 the site was already an established tourist stop, which is why Cooper had gone there himself two years earlier. In his

correspondence with his patron Daniel Wadsworth in 1828 regarding another painting of a cave, Cole outlined his opinion on caves as natural features:

Though a cave may be a gloomy object in Nature – a *view* of its entrance gives rise to those trains of pensive feeling and thought that I have always found the most exquisitely delightful – The poets often speak of caves, and grottos as pleasing objects, and I do not know why the painter may not think as the poet – It is a cool retreat during the Noon-day heats (McNulty 1983, 38).

This quotation highlights two distinct interpretations of caves, the gloomy Gothic cave and the cool grotto, a common feature in landscape gardens.

Cole's inclusion of the cave on a mountaintop is curious, as this geological feature would not exist in nature in this location. It is entirely fictional. But Cole's paintings are not necessarily topographically or geologically accurate; he takes license with scenery in order to imbue the landscape with the European architectural motifs that were necessarily lacking in American landscapes. In 1852, Cooper noted, "One does not expect to meet with a ruined castle or abbey, or even fortress, in America" (60), and in 1836 Cole himself noted the lack of "associations, such as arise amid the scenes of the old world" (108). Earlier, in 1826, Cole had attempted to rectify this lack by shaping the cave opening in his painting *Kaaterskill Falls* (fig. 1) as a Gothic pointed arch, thereby sanctifying the landscape while simultaneously endowing the landscape with an Old World legitimacy. Likewise, in the Fenimore Art Museum's *Landscape Scene from "The Last of the Mohicans"* (fig. 3), which is compositionally similar to the Wadsworth painting, Cole creates a pointed arch by maneuvering the large outcropping of rock in the lower left corner of the painting into an unusual position. As the rock leans to the left and meets the rock ledge across the ravine, a Gothic arch appears through which the autumnal mountainside is revealed. This Gothic arch is an utter manipulation on Cole's part, and given the general knowledge among educated elites about geology in this period, his artistic license did not go unnoticed. In 1827, his patron, Robert Gilmor, Jr. wrote,

Being a composition, the arrangement of your rocks is *artificial*: the rock falling against another on the opposite side of a deep ravine, is finely rendered, but strikes the eye as something forced & not ordinarily seen in nature, but nothing could be better *painted* (qtd. in Parry 1988, 64).

Indeed, Hudson River School paintings were metaphorically haunted by the Gothic architectural feature of the arch.

American interest in natural Gothic arches derives from a similar impulse in nineteenth-century European art and literature. The German Romantic landscape painter, Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840), mirrors the natural arch with its architectural equivalent in his painting *Abbey in the Oak Forest* (1809-10), in which a procession of monks moves toward a fragmented abbey with a Gothic arched

entryway (fig. 4). Above the abbey's pointed arch, the tree branches almost bend into the shape of an arch. Art historian Karl Whittington has characterized the painting as one of many "deathscapes" (paintings depicting "open graves, cemeteries, and churchyards often in winter and ruin") by Friedrich. In opposition to transcendent and hopeful interpretations of the painting, Whittington adheres to the notion that the painting is unabashedly "depressing," "a meditation not on transcendence but on death itself" (2012, 1, 3). Gnarled and leafless trees surround the figures within the shadowy landscape. Here the Gothic arch acts as a liminal portal between life and death, and the Gothic is equated with nature. Indeed, nineteenth-century observers saw Gothic architecture as organic. In *The Deerslayer* (1841), Cooper imagines that forests inspired the Gothic builders:

The arches of the woods, even at high noon, cast their sombre shadows on the spots, which the brilliant rays of the sun that struggled through the leaves contributed to mellow, and, if such an expression can be used, to illuminate. It was probably from a similar scene that the mind of man first got its idea of the effects of Gothic tracery and churchly hues; this temple of nature producing some such effect, so far as light and shadows were concerned, as the well-known offspring of human invention (1987, 466-67).

However, Michael Makarius points out that "this notion can just as well be turned on its head; the whole attraction of the ruin lies in its almost allowing a product of nature to be perceived as a human artifact" (Makarius 2004, 140). Indeed, in the nineteenth-century United States, geological features resembling architecture became tourist attractions. An example is Dover Stone Church in Dover Plains, New York in the Hudson Valley region. This natural cave opening mimics the shape of a Gothic pointed arch, and tourists visited to see the interior cavern with its "pulpit" (a rock ledge). A local literary journal *The Poughkeepsie Casket* described the Dover Stone Church in 1838:

[The Church] is formed by a large fissure in a rock on the margin of a mountain which rises abruptly from the plain [...] The 'Church' has two apartments; the inner is the larger, being about seventy feet in length. They are separated from a huge mass of rock, which seems to have been detached from above, and has been aptly termed the *pulpit* [...] a staircase leads to extensive ledges at a height of thirty feet, forming commodious galleries overlooking the body of the 'Church' below. Altogether, this natural excavation is so formed as to give, very readily, to the beholder the idea of a temple of worship (Lossing 1838, 137).

Thomas Cole's friend and fellow landscape painter Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) visited the Dover Stone Church and his rendering highlights the cave opening as a ruined Gothic arch (fig. 5).

Like caves, trees also took the shape of Gothic arches, and writers associated the Gothic arch with the natural canopy of trees. In Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily and her father travel by carriage through the French countryside in search of accommodations for the night. Traveling between tree rows of oak and chestnut, "whose intermingled branches formed a lofty arch above," Emily almost shudders in response to "something so gloomy and desolate" (63). And there are numerous examples of trees bending to form an arched canopy in the forests depicted on Hudson River School canvases. But in American landscape paintings, Gothic arches more often represent the presence of God in nature. For example, Durand's painting *Early Morning at Cold Spring* of 1850 (fig. 6) commonly referred to as *Sabbath Bells* in the nineteenth-century after a line from a William Cullen Bryant poem, presents the viewer with a solitary figure situated off-center beneath trees with branches tilting inward to create a noticeable pointed arch. Durand innovated the use of the vertical format in American landscape paintings, thereby accentuating the upward thrust of the Gothic arch. In the era of Transcendentalism, Durand believed that nature was an appropriate place for worship. In a letter, he wrote, "To-day again is Sunday. I do not attend the church service, the better to indulge reflection unrestrained under the high canopy of heaven, amidst the expanse of waters" (qtd. in Gallati 1987, 111). Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910), a second-generation Hudson River School painter, adopted the vertical format for his paintings of interior forest scenes, such as *The Old Hunting Grounds* of 1864 (fig. 7). In *Book of the Artists*, Henry Tuckerman notes that the "silvery birches [...] lean towards each other as though breathing of the light of other days" (1867, 518). Art historian Anthony Janson points out that Whittredge's painting is "a complex realization of William Cullen Bryant's poetry" (1989, 83). Indeed, the painting is a visualization of Bryant's "A Forest Hymn" (1825) in which Bryant writes, "The Groves were God's first temples" (1847, 130). Paintings of tree boughs forming a pointed Gothic interior are common amongst Hudson River School paintings; art historian Kevin Avery has called the works of Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880) "woodland 'naves,'" an apt architectural metaphor especially evident in Gifford's *Kauterskill Falls* of 1871 (fig. 8; 2003, 203).

But how do we reconcile these two divergent interpretations of the American wilderness, the dark and frightening Gothic forests of Cooper's novels and the contemplative and serene scenes of Durand, Whittredge, and Gifford? Perhaps the two visions of nature are not so different. Matthew Sivils explains:

It is tempting to view Transcendentalism and the American Gothic as conflicting literary movements. After all, Emerson's healing, uplifting, divine woods seem a far cry from the dark wildernesses found in the Gothic texts. Upon closer consideration, however, they might be said to share some important commonalities [...] [they both] promote the idea that mankind ultimately dictates the moral atmosphere of the natural world (124).

In upstate New York, tourists could experience both the terrifying sublime and the calm, reassuring Transcendental landscape. Washington Irving describes wild scenery in the Catskill Mountains as typically sublime:

The interior of these mountains is in the highest degree wild and romantic; here are rocky precipices mantled with primeval forests; deep gorges walled in by beetling cliffs, with torrents tumbling as it were from the sky; and savage glens rarely trodden excepting by the hunter (71).

But while the Catskills and the Hudson River Valley could be sublime, they could also be beautiful, in Burkean terms. An Englishman named John Fowler traveled the Hudson by steamboat in 1830 and wrote:

I was so hurried on from the sublime to the beautiful, that before the image of one had impressed itself upon the mind, the other appeared to take possession, and every successive change but deepened the thrill of admiration and rapture (qtd. in Schuyler 2012, 10-11).

In general, landscape tourists were “not seeking a wilderness experience,” but rather a comfortable tour of sites familiar from their readings of history and literature (ibid, 10).

Cooper’s Cave is a bit different, as it more closely allies with Gothic tourism. Visitors to the cave wanted to experience the Gothic excitement of the Huron attack on Hawk-eye and his fellow travelers. Theodore Dwight’s book *Northern Traveller* was the first guidebook to describe the sites associated with *The Last of the Mohicans*, in its 1831 edition (Bellico, 249). Dwight calls the cavern scene in the novel “one of the most interesting chapters of Mr. [James Fenimore] Cooper’s novel *The Last of the Mohicans*.” He goes on to note that “The cavern (perhaps altered since 1757) was the place where the wanderers secreted themselves, and were made captives” (qtd. in Bellico 1995, 254). But Gothic tourists were sometimes a bit disappointed by what they saw. Nicholas Murray visited Glens Falls in 1826, and his memoirs were published posthumously in 1863. From his description of Cooper’s Cave, we see that Murray expected to recognize the landscape features he had read about in *The Last of the Mohicans*:

In company with some ladies, I took a walk to the celebrated Glenn [sic] Falls, rendered classic by the pen of Cooper [...] It is indeed a most romantic spot [...] I went into the cave where Uncas and black-eyed Cora, together with their songster, Gamut, passed the terrible night when the infernal Magua was in their pursuit. It looked not as if it would make a bed ‘soft as downy pillows are.’ It is formed by the meeting together of two rocks which Nature’s chisel seems to have

converted into an alcove. It is admirably calculated for the protection of innocence from Indian ferocity. The tree now exists not on which Hawkeye shot his pursuer nor can we find many of the prominent situations and cliffs described by Cooper. They are fast passing away; even the adamantine rocks decay before the withering march of Time (Prime 1863, 76-78).

It is important to keep in mind that Murray visited Cooper's Cave only two years after Cooper was there; Murray cannot identify the landscape passages that Cooper described in the novel, but he excuses Cooper for his artistic license by musing about the passage of time since the novel's action in 1757.

While Cooper's Cave itself was not as Gothic as its visitors had hoped, it was the Gothic center of *The Last of the Mohicans* that brought them there. Other tourist attractions could offer perhaps a more authentic experience of the Gothic. Martha Rugg, an amateur botanist who visited Niagara Falls in 1844, confronted firsthand the difference between the sublime and the beautiful in American scenery. As she was collecting plant specimens on the edge of the falls (a genteel and seemingly peaceful activity), she lost her footing and plunged into a bank of rocks. She was found "upon the points of the cragged rocks alive," but she died three hours later, according to one 1850 guidebook (*The Niagara Falls Guide* 1850, 107-108). The guidebook also tells us that "The Indians have a superstitious tradition that the spirit of the Falls required an annual offering of two human victims," before providing profiles of some of the more prominent fatalities (ibid, 103). The morbid site of Rugg's death became its own tourist attraction, complete with a sentimental marker.

Today there are signs pointing tourists in South Glens Falls to a street named "Cooper's Cave Drive," at the end of which is Cooper's Cave itself. Cooper's Cave has been a tourist attraction ever since the publication of *The Last of the Mohicans*. The novel has continued to be relevant and popular; it was a bestseller in the nineteenth century and has since become an American classic (Barker and Sabin 1995, 34-55; Mott 1947, 74-76). In the nineteenth century, wooden and then iron steps led tourists to Cooper's Cave, and a concrete staircase built in 1915 provided access from the bridge above the falls until it was removed in 1962 (Bellico 1995, 254). Today a viewing platform with informational placards allows visitors to get close to the cave, although tourists are no longer able to reach the cavern itself. The best view of the cavern is from the bridge over the Hudson River linking the city of Glens Falls to the village of South Glens Falls (also known as "The Village at Cooper's Cave"), where one can see the Gothic opening of the cave that has been replicated at the entrance to Cooper's Cave Ale Company across town. Throughout Glens Falls are reminders of Cooper's importance to the tourism industry. Guests at the Queensbury Hotel on Ridge Street sit by the fireplace, over which hangs a very large painting by the American artist Griffith Baily Coale of the cavern scene in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1926). In the painting, Hawk-eye appears in the Gothic arch of the cavern with a torch illuminating and accentuating its pointed arch form, while his fellow refugees

prepare to enter the cavern. Directly behind the wall on which the painting hangs, tourists can dine at Fenimore's Lounge in the hotel. At Cooper's Cave Ale Company, one may order a "James Fenimore Cooper" burger with "Cave Fries" and purchase Cooper-related souvenirs in the restaurant's retail shop.

Yet while the cave is still somewhat accessible, one has to stretch one's Gothic imagination to the fullest to imagine Hawk-eye and his friends seeking shelter in the cavern, as the river has become highly industrialized around the cave and has lost whatever sublime aspect it had when Cooper visited in 1824. However, in the nineteenth century, visitors flocked to the site, hoping to experience the sublime in nature, their minds prepared by their reading of *The Last of the Mohicans*. The cavern was indeed a site of Gothic tourism. At the same time, Cooper was intentional in linking his novel with the burgeoning tourist industry in upstate New York. His earlier book *Lionel Lincoln* (1825) had been "a commercial and critical failure" (Gassan 2008, 105). Hence, he linked the setting of *The Last of the Mohicans*, his next novel, to actual tourist sites on the upstate circuit, cultivating a tourist audience. As Richard H. Gassan asserts,

Cooper was careful to make the landscape he had traveled with his friends central to the plot of *Mohicans* [...] Throughout, he stressed that the book's events were being conducted across tourist sites, and he regularly hinted that these were places that his readers knew (ibid, 107).

While the young United States had no authentic medieval castles to explore, visitors to Cooper's Cave hoped for a Udolpho-like experience among its imagined rooms and thresholds. But Cooper's Cave had an additional draw, as landscape tourism promised visitors access to what Cole called the 'birthright' of all Americans – the beauty, magnificence and sublimity of American scenery. Wisely, Cooper exploited his audience's appetite for both Gothic thrills and for contact with the unique and sublime scenery of upstate New York, promoting an experience that combined Gothic and landscape tourism. Like the pointed arches of Hudson River School landscape paintings, the Gothic as a literary genre and architectural style was made palatable to the tourist audience, who wanted to experience the sublime vicariously through literature but not end up like Martha Rugg, a victim to the terrifying landscape of the New World.

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Contributor Details

Kerry Dean Carso is chair and associate professor of art history at the State University of New York at New Paltz, where she teaches courses on American art and architecture with an emphasis on the Hudson Valley. Her research focuses on interconnections between the arts and literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century United States. She is the author of *American Gothic Art and Architecture in the Age of Romantic Literature* (2014; University of Wales Press), winner of the 2015 Henry-Russell Hitchcock Award from the Victorian Society in America. She is currently working on a book manuscript entitled "Follies in America: A History of Garden and Park Architecture, 1776-1876" and a project on "The After-Life of American Victorian Architecture in the Inter-War Years". Professor Carso earned a PhD and MA in American Studies from Boston University and an BA in English and American Literature and Language from Harvard University.

E-mail: carsok@newpaltz.edu

BOOK REVIEW

Francesca Saggini. *The Gothic Novel and the Stage*. Pickering and Chatto Limited, 2015. 216 pp. Hard Cover. ISBN-13: 978-1-84893-414-6

Reviewed by Blair Speakman (Auckland University of Technology)

Throughout *The Gothic Novel and the Stage: Romantic Appropriations*, Francesca Saggini sets out to provide a different point of entry into the relationship between the Gothic novel and drama; the circular process of appropriation of both Gothic dramas and novels. Saggini divides the book into four clear sections. Parts One and Two are devoted to a broad analysis of the appropriation of Romantic Gothic stage dramas from the mid-1760s to the early 1800s in order to provide the reader with the historical and cultural context around the popularity and appropriation of these Gothic texts. Part One introduces the themes and forms of Gothic drama, while Part Two covers the use of three specific aspects of Gothic dramatic language including music, lighting, and set design. Saggini provides an analysis of two Gothic stage dramas, *Fontainville Forest* and *The Monk*, throughout the latter half of the book in order to illustrate the practice of Romantic stage appropriation.

Saggini offers an insight into how the distinction between high and low culture in the late 1700s to early 1800s impacted the critical and academic neglect of the Gothic drama. Saggini contends that despite the Gothic drama's immense popularity with audiences at the time, this genre of stage play was largely neglected and marginalised by both critics and scholars as it was perceived to be a "lower-class form of cultural trash" (p. 216). The author provided an inclusive and holistic reading of the Gothic as an appropriative genre throughout her analysis of the

appropriation of both the Gothic Stage drama and the Gothic novel. In particular, Saggini approaches the Gothic as a “cultural mechanism that took over a plethora of literary, para-literary and extra-literary texts/objects and incorporated them into a new diversified language” (p. 215). This holistic approach to the Gothic stage drama allowed the author to provide a critical examination of how in its movement from one cultural zone to another (for example, from novel to stage drama), the Gothic involves the presence of a proactive audience.

Specifically, Saggini discusses how musical elements were crucial in the renegotiation of the generic hierarchies of the Gothic. Saggini elaborates that music acted as a connection between legitimate and illegitimate forms, making it possible for the Gothic to appropriate a well-established literary performative capital while simultaneously reinventing the cultural status of the genre. This discussion of cultural negotiation allowed for an insight into the theatrical appropriation of elitist cultural experiences, highlighting the nebulous relationship between high and low culture. However, Saggini does not critically examine the cultural and hierarchical renegotiation of the Gothic stage drama in relation to Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital. Furthermore, the author chooses not to address cultural capital at length when examining the distinction between high and low culture, and how the relationship between the two influenced public perception of the Gothic stage drama. Incorporating Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital may have allowed for a greater critical insight into whether fans of Gothic stage dramas were culturally marginalised by the elitist classes due to the Gothic’s perception of being a spectacle.

Overall, this book is useful as a critical commentary on the appropriation of Gothic stage drama from the late 1700s to early 1800s, especially regarding the exemplary texts of *Fontainville Forest* and *The Monk*. Saggini clearly fulfils the goals that she has set out for the book by offering an insightful, detailed, and interesting academic study. Since the author provides an in-depth look at the historical and cultural context around the appropriation of the Gothic stage drama during the late 1700s, the book will be a very accessible resource to readers with limited knowledge of the topic or the texts.

Reviewer’s E-mail: blairspeakman01@gmail.com