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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

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## “Not fit to be mentioned”: Eighteenth-Century Sodomy and Francis Lathom’s *The Midnight Bell*.

Christine Mangan

On 27 September 1810, thousands of spectators lined the streets awaiting the passage of six convicted sodomites, who were sentenced to stand in the Pillory in London’s Haymarket. One journalist reported that “at an early hour the Old Bailey was completely blockaded,” causing the closure of the Sessions, as well as local shops from Ludgate-Hill to the Haymarket, and leading several newspapers to declare the event as “the most astonishing public punishment of the century” (“Vere Street Club” 211-13; Norton 191). Sentenced for a crime that contemporary publications deemed “not fit to be mentioned,” the convicted were met with the arrival of “ammunition wagons” selling “offal, dung” and rotten fruit and vegetables, “together with the remains of divers dogs and cats” (“Vere Street Club” 212). One account notes that “the first salute received by the prisoners was a volley of mud,” so that by the time they had reached half way to the pillory, the prisoners, or “monsters,” as they were referred to in contemporary accounts, were “completely disfigured” and “not discernible as human beings” (213). Ian McCormick writes of the incident, “dehumanized, [the convicted] became the perverse spectre of sodomy itself, all too present in its offensive exhibition, absent in its eradicated humanity” (12). “Disfigured,” or “destroyed” by “mud” the prisoners embody the contemporary portrayal of sodomites as something unnameable, as illustrated in the 1750 edition of *Old England: Or, Broadbottom Journal*, in which one anonymous author concluded that “There are not words in our Language expressive enough of the Horror of it (*emphasis original*).” The link between “horror” and “sodomy” is furthered conveyed in the physicality of the prisoners, who are, not only covered in mud but also “battered” by “hits in the face,” leaving one with “a lump...as large as an egg” and another bearing “two eyes...completely closed up” (“Vere Street Club” 213). In their indistinguishable state, as “so thickly covered with filth, that a vestige of the human figure was scarce-

ly discernable” they are transformed into something “disfigured” (213). The conflicting duality of the accused’s simultaneous presence and absence is an exemplification of the contradictory juxtaposition of contemporary ideology on sodomy—one that culminated in the latter half of the eighteenth century, with the demand for both silence and public punishment.

The establishment of such practice is often traced back to the sixteenth-century jurist Sir Edward Coke, although it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that accounts of sodomy trials began to disappear from publications that had once printed “vibrant and detailed evidence” for public consumption (Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker). Coke is often credited as being the initiator of the movement to silence all mention of sodomy in legal matters. Although it would take until the eighteenth century to adopt his suggestion completely, contemporary critics and historians point towards Coke as the reason that such silence was enacted. In *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (1628), Coke writes that sodomy, or buggery, is “a detestable and abominable sin, amongst Christians not to be named,” thereby initiating what legal commentators and scholars refer to as “the injunction to silence” (58). The influence of Coke’s objection to the “naming” of sodomy is evident in various pamphlets that appear throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with writers condemning sodomy as an “unnatural crime” that carried the potential to unleash an “uncontrollable confusion” among society.<sup>1</sup> Netta Murray Goldsmith argues that the influence of Coke’s mandate can be seen in the courtroom as early as 1742, when one reporter from the Old Bailey expressed his hesitation in writing down the physical details of a sodomy case as “they were not fit to be committed to paper” (Goldsmith 45). George Haggerty further notes that within contemporary pub-

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lications there was a continued absence of description when it came to defining the actual act of sodomy, with broadsides and fictional accounts of sodomy remaining deliberately vague, while trial accounts managed to “talk around sodomy” altogether (167).

Over a century later, William Blackstone echoes Coke’s sentiments in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), writing:

I will not act so disagreeable a part, to my readers as well as myself, as to dwell any longer on a subject, the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature. It will be more eligible to imitate in this respect the delicacy of our English law, which treats it, in its very indictments, as a crime not fit to be named. (Blackstone 215)

Accordingly, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the words “sodomy” and “buggery” were replaced in print by “unnatural crime,” “detestable and abominable crime,” one “not fit to be mentioned,” and “among Christians not to be named,” as the former were thought to be “utterly unfit for the public eye” (*Old Bailey Proceedings*). *The Daily Advertiser*, for example, refused to name sodomy, instead referring to it as “the unnatural and abominable crime of \*\*\*\*\*,” the asterisks in use representing a popular method of exclusion called “gutting” (Issue 1233). Consequently, throughout the 1790s, it was common to find that Courts “ordered the publication of [sodomy cases] to be suppressed,” claiming the evidence presented was “unfit for publication” as “the nature of [such] case[s] obviously preclude[d] [them] from stating the particulars of it” (*Old Bailey Proceedings*).

The motivation behind the demand for silence on matters of sodomy can be located, Jody Greene argues, in anxieties about contamination (203-232). Such threats prompted contemporary debates about the risk of making trials involving sodomy known to the public. In his pamphlet *Principles of Penal Law* (1771), William Eden questioned whether it was safe to have public prosecutions for sodomy, as he worried that such publicity would

encourage the continued perpetuation of such crimes. In 1780, Edmund Burke gave a speech on the crime, which he stated “could scarcely be mentioned, much less defended or extenuated,” further warning that sodomy was “a crime of all others the most detestable, because it tended to vitiate the morals of the whole community, and to defeat the first and chief end of society” (388-90). Burke’s words betray the real threat that sodomy posed, as the word itself represented “all that lies outside the system of alliance that judicially guarantees marriage and inheritance, the prerogative of blood, as the linchpin of social order” (Haggerty 27). Coke warned that sodomy was treason against the King of Heaven: thus, it was not considered a crime against persons or property, but was treated similarly to treason in that it was “a crime against order” and patriarchy (McFarlane 36). The punishment for treason was to be hanged and quartered, the process of which including the evisceration of bowels, or “gutting,” incidentally, the same name of the popular method used to exclude the word “sodomite” from print (26). That sodomy contained the power to upset “the order of things” is evident, McFarlane argues, in the portrayal of sodomy in literature as a “disordered inverted, or ‘preposterous’ act.” (34).<sup>2</sup> McFarlane cites the OED’s definition of “preposterous” as “contrary to the order of nature,” once again aligning sodomy with something that is outside the natural order (34). In an effort to contain the spread of sodomy and the threat it presented to patriarchy, the suppression of knowledge on sodomy was made possible.

Much of the information gathered on sodomy in the eighteenth century originates from trial records, a source which increasingly becomes problematic in the second half of the century as “trials for sodomy itself gradually fall silent” (Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker). H.G. Cocks notes that “the attempt to prevent discussion of sodomy was an established part of English legal tradition,” and as such, sodomy cases were either not recorded or destroyed (78). Cocks writes that proceedings for sodomy cases were not recorded from 1775 onwards, despite the fact that every other criminal trial was covered in detail and recorded in bound volumes (20). Leslie Moran further supports this view when he

1 Some of the more famous pamphlets that were published included: George Lesly’s *Fire and Brimstone, Or, the Destruction of Sodom and A Treatise and Wherin are Strict Observations upon That detestable and most shocking sin of sodomy* (1728).

2 The latter is taken from Cleland’s *A Woman of Pleasure*, where he describes a sexual act between two men as a “project of preposterous pleasure.”

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maintains that “in order to speak of buggery within that legal tradition, the speaker had to proceed according to a command to remain silent,” and that eighteenth-century cases “demonstrate this juxtaposition between the injunction to silence and the requirement to speak” (79). By failing to keep any written records of these trials, the “verdicts and names were the only way in which those convicted of unnatural crimes were recorded in official legal documentation” (Cocks 79).

Such anxieties regarding the naming of sodomy in public also affected the voice of the accused during trial. Goldsmith claims that defendants not only had the right to speak for themselves, but that those who could afford to do so were permitted to hire a lawyer (Goldsmith 42). However, such claims are challenged by Cocks’ contention that an unprecedented “silencing of the accused by the trial process” took place during the late eighteenth century (Cocks 87). For while, Goldsmith explains that the sodomite could “cross-examine the prosecution witnesses...could also call his own witnesses...and give his version of events,” Cocks references John Langbein’s seminal work on the criminal trial in the late eighteenth century to corroborate his argument that those accused of the criminal offence of sodomy were denied the privilege of speech (Goldsmith 42; Cocks 88). Cocks claims that newly introduced rules of evidence forced defendants into silence, a state that was in “stark contrast” to trials of the previous centuries, which “not only featured strong participation by the defendant, but... were surrounded by a vibrant print culture” (87-89).<sup>3</sup> The “injunction to silence” in both the courtroom and in print took place at the same time that “public anxiety about the existence and activities of sodomites led to an increase in public fascination with their punishment” (“Vere Street Club” 211). Consequently, it was during this period of silence that the greatest number of prosecutions for sodomy took place, as officials believed they could curtail such a spread with notices of severe punishment (Cocks 7-8).<sup>4</sup>

Over the course of the 1790s, the Old Bailey tried six cases that featured men who “feloniously wickedly diabolically and against the order of nature” committed acts of sodomy (Old Bailey). During the eighteenth

century, the word “sodomy” was not tied exclusively to homosexuality. It contained a myriad of definitions, including “a sin committed by mankind with mankind or with brute beast or by womankind with brute beast” (Coke 58). Additionally, sodomy was not limited to sexual acts between men, but included women as well. As such, although there are numerous cases involving sodomy that appeared at the Old Bailey during the 1790s, the scope here has been limited to those that present the probability of consensual relationships. Such a relationship is defined by those cases that were classified as offenses rather than assaults, which indicates the use of violence. Furthermore, they involve accusations brought by a third party and focus on relationships between men who are of legal age.

Newspaper references to these trials are brief and contain little information. When Joseph Bacon and Richard Briggs were tried in 1790, the Old Bailey Sessions Papers reported that evidence from the trial was “utterly unfit for the public eye,” while in 1790, when Alexander Leake stood trial for sodomy, the Sessions Papers wrote only that “The evidence Upon this Trial being so indecent, is unfit for publication” (*Old Bailey Proceedings*). Just one year later, in the trial of William Winklin, the Old Bailey Sessions Papers observed that “the evidence on trial being extremely indecent, the court ordered the publication of it to be suppressed” (*Old Bailey Proceedings*). Similarly, local newspapers were restrictive in the details they allowed to be printed, noting only the convict’s crime, and avoiding the terms “sodomy” and “buggery” in preference to references such as “a most detestable crime” or a crime “not fit to be mentioned.” The Old Bailey Sessions Rolls provides only the charge, the outcome, and in a few cases, the accuser. As such, the accused are defined only by their name and their crime, as no records featuring their individual voices exist.

J.M. Beattie makes a similar argument about the relationship between self and act when discussing the eighteenth-century punishment of the pillory, the very intention of which was to “mark [the sodomite] out in public” so the townspeople would know he was “a person not fit to be trusted, but to be shunned and avoided by all creditable and honest men” (464).

3 Cocks locates the sodomite’s ‘voice,’ in exculpatory texts, radical squibs, and criminal petitions. However, Cocks places his argument primarily in the nineteenth century, with all evidence originating from 1800 onwards. These opportunities for speech did not seem to be available to the accused men of the 1790s.

4 Cocks asserts that “Starting in about 1780, increasing numbers of men were prosecuted for homosexual offenses.” It was an increase that lasted throughout the nineteenth century, although he locates the majority of these prosecutions to have taken place between 1780-1850. Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 7-8.

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Jody Greene too, notes that the pillory, by publicly associating the accused with their crime, “made acts into behaviors, and behaviors into enduring personal attributes” (213). The public censure of these men operates in the same fashion. With criminal law “determin[ing] what could and could not be said legitimately about homosexuality,” coupled with the law’s continual referral to sodomites as “the thing that cannot be named,” the accused sodomite transforms into that very thing which society warns against (Cocks 8). As the law’s authority sanctioned force, it became a form of violence in its “termination of a person’s liberty and freedom” and “prohibition of particular social relations” (Moran 20). Moran argues, then, that law can be read as an act of violence: violence is defined by the use of force and the law must be enforced, therefore, the law is violent (20).

The temporally embedded narratives of trial, torture and imprisonment found within Francis Lathom’s *The Midnight Bell* engage with contemporary discourse on the subject of sodomy and silence, as the violence used to simultaneously uncover their secrets and silence them is representative of contemporary ideology and the law’s determination to silence sodomites. Just as the image of the muddy, “disfigured” sodomites signals their dehumanization, when read in the context of eighteenth-century sodomy trials, Lathom’s narratives become emblematic of the silence and the discursive strategy of debasement that accused sodomites experienced under eighteenth-century law. As such, within *The Midnight Bell*, the law or violence, or both, is used to dehumanize the individual until “death,” both real and metaphorical, offers the only possibility of reclaiming agency.

Francis Lathom may well have been aware of the relationship that existed between silence and sodomy, as various biographies have long speculated about his own connection with homosexuality. In the absence of facts, much has been conjectured about Lathom’s life. Born in Rotterdam in 1774, Lathom moved to Norwich, England when he was a young man and subsequently became a successful playwright and novelist. However, despite this success, in either 1802 or 1803, Lathom relocated to Scotland. It is the question of what precipitated this move that has garnered the most attention among his biographers. While some have surmised that Lathom was the illegitimate son of a wealthy Englishman, thus ensuring an annuity that allowed him to continue writing in any location, David Punter has rightly ques-

tioned the validity of this assertion. Tracing the claim of Lathom’s illegitimacy to a passage written for the *Dictionary of National Biography* during the nineteenth century, Punter writes that since its publication, no evidence has been discovered to substantiate his parentage. At the same time, David Punter allows that Lathom’s move to Scotland must have been well-funded, “to an extent not entirely to be accounted for by his literary career,” but that the origins of these funds remain unknown. Other biographers believe that Lathom’s relocation to Scotland was the result of a homosexual affair that forced him to flee from England.

Such speculation first originated in Montague Summer’s *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (1938), despite no evidence to prove his theory. More recently, James D. Jenkins writes that although a homosexual affair was possible, another explanation could be “that, in a city as charged with political and religious discord as Norwich was in the late 1790s, the cause of Lathom’s departure from Norwich resulted from a falling-out over politics or religion” (viii). However Jenkins does acknowledge that the notion of Lathom being homosexual is “quite plausible” based on “the portrayal of male-male friendships in many of Lathom’s novels... where the ‘friendship’ between the two young men... is obviously of a homosexual nature” (viii). Furthermore, Jenkins cites Franz Potter’s biography on Lathom, the latter of which argues that Lathom’s decision to leave Norwich might have originated as a result of his father’s will, which contained the stipulation that Lathom must separate himself from his wife and three children in order to continue receiving his annuity. Jenkins points out that this account might be explained by Lathom’s homosexuality if one were to posit that the reason behind Lathom’s father’s request for his son to absent himself from his wife and children’s lives was because he did not approve of him for these exact reasons (viii).

Only the barest facts are known of Lathom’s personal life in Scotland, although he is reported to have settled in Fyvie, Aberdeenshire, with a friend named Alexander Rennie. It was reported that there Lathom “developed many eccentricities,” “drank whisky freely” and wore colorful garments “as if he had been a play-actor” (Taylor; *The Banffshire Journal*). Instead, “he put on parti-coloured garments with grace and elegance in the manner of a play actor. He developed a taste of whiskey which “he drank a little too freely and a little too often” (Taylor). Lathom’s “mysterious” life is complicated

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further by the fact that, upon his death, he was “buried in a lonely churchyard...in a grave marked by the wrong name” (Jenkins x). Punter considers Lathom’s life as “a construct, a narrative,” in which the dichotomy of “secrecy and display” are apparent in Lathom’s “dandified” appearance and his simultaneous refusal to “drop not a single reliable hint about his own family and ancestry” to the villagers he lived among (ix). Such notions of “secrecy and display” recall the relationship between the demand for silence on the subject of sodomy and its public punishment in the latter part of the eighteenth century. It is perhaps for this reason, then, that questions of identity resonate within *The Midnight Bell*, as the two embedded tales under analysis exemplify the accused sodomite’s struggle to retain individualism when faced with a contemporary ideology determined to silence and punish all evidence of sodomitical practices.

The primary narrative of *The Midnight Bell* begins as the hero of the novel, Alphonsus Cohenburg, receives instructions from his mother to flee Cohenburg Castle. Clutching a bloody dagger, she informs Alphonsus that his father has been murdered and demands that her son leave for fear that he too is in danger. During his exile, Alphonsus is tormented by the question of what befell his parents that mysterious night, eventually finding himself at the Convent of St. Helena. Here, Alphonsus meets, falls in love with, and marries Lauretta, a young novice at the church. Not long after, an aristocrat named Theodore hires a group of bandits to kidnap Lauretta in an attempt to steal her from Alphonsus. The remainder of the novel is dedicated to Alphonsus locating Lauretta and attempting to solve the mystery surrounding Cohenburg Castle. Embedded within this first, or primary, story is the temporally displaced narrative of the Hermit, whom Lauretta encounters while fleeing from the bandits.

Ideas of containment are central to the Hermit’s tale, reflected in both its content and structure. When first introduced to the heroine, the Hermit is living in self-imposed seclusion, his exile from society an extenuation of the confinement he has previously endured. This demarcation is mirrored in the structure of Lathom’s novel, as the Hermit’s narrative is separate and distinct from that of the first or primary narrative. For, although the Hermit is present within the first story (he offers assistance to Lauretta as she is fleeing Theodore), his tale of misfortune remains entirely contained within his narrative of temporal displacement. Indeed, even his

brief presence within the first narrative is eventually negated as he fails in his attempts to aid the heroine: upon articulation of his narrative, he succumbs to old age, leaving Lauretta defenseless and open to the impending attack of Theodore. Notions of containment are further emphasized through the anonymity of the Hermit’s identity. While the employment of disguise is more explicit in Lathom’s other embedded narrative, notions of secrecy and display still persist throughout the Hermit’s tale. Patricia Duncker notes that “queer lives...are often lived within Gothic codes,” and that such narratives often “hinge upon transvestitism, seeming, and disguise” (58). Here, the Hermit reveals to Lauretta the truth of who he once was—without ever revealing his name—an admission that betrays the designation of “Hermit” to be a concealment, an identity that he has adopted for fifteen years only in order to survive. The notion that this disguise is one that has been assumed (rather than reflect an internal transformation) is intimated in the Hermit’s own admission that his current abode once belonged to someone else and that he had “found it deserted; its late possessor having been some years dead” (Lathom 89). Therefore, the character of the Hermit (and his place of residence) is one that has been consciously inhabited by the man now known as the Hermit in order to stay hidden from the rest of the world, thus containing the secret of his former self.

The Hermit’s tale focuses on his relationship with a man named Dulac, whose subsequent abduction places the Hermit on a trajectory that recalls eighteenth-century anxieties over the spread of sodomy. The name “Dulac” is significant here, as the French translation of “du lac” is “of the lake,” an image that, because of its relation to water, is “closely connected with the symbolism of the abyss” and “serves to corroborate the fatal implications of the lake-symbol” (Cirlot 175). In Middle English “lake” also carried the dual meaning “pit of hell,” a definition that stands at odds with its traditional association with “self-contemplation, consciousness and revelation” (175). While both definitions resonate within the text, it is Dulac’s association with the “fatal implications” of the symbol that serve as a foreshadowing of the Hermit’s descent into “hell” or a “state of misery.” This descent commences at the very start of his tale, when, on a journey to visit his recently-wed sister, the Hermit’s horse is injured, forcing him to seek assistance at the nearest mansion. The owner is Dulac, and although he has no rooms to spare, he offers the Hermit

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a place to spend the night, explaining that: “if you would condescend to accept half of my pallet, you [are] heartily welcome to it” (Lathom 78). Contemporary audiences may have been aware of the implications of this offer, as Rictor Norton writes that while it was common practice in the eighteenth century for men to share beds, early Victorian magazines nevertheless made clear the threat of sodomy that came with such hospitality. Norton references an early pornographic magazine which features “an exquisite tale about a merchant’s lad who shared a bed with a stranger” and who, after falling asleep, was “awaked in the night, by a most acute smarting pain, and a horrible commotion in his guts. In fact, he found the enemy in full possession of his close quarters, who would not retire until he had completed his errand” (Norton “Caterwauling”).

Following the Hermit’s acceptance of Dulac’s bed, the two journey to “the margin of a small lake,” where the Hermit admits that he is “entranced” by “the most romantic scenery imagination can figure” (Lathom 79). Here, rather than “fatal” implications, the lake is transformed into a place of comfort for the Hermit, with the lake holding “the significance of a mirror, presenting an image of self-contemplation, consciousness and revelation” (Cirlot 175). Two paths are then revealed to the Hermit: to the right “lay the ruins of an ancient monastery, with its decayed bridge, forming a hazardous pass over a bubbling rivulet”; while on the left “the open country afforded a prospect of many leagues in extent, speckled at intervals with clusters of trees; straggling cottages, easy hills and browsing cattle” (Lathom 79). While the left represents the possibility of hope in the tranquility of a pastoral scene, the other way contains the “ruins” of a “monastery,” the former of which finds its etymological meaning in “to live alone,” while similarly, “Hermit,” from the Greek *eremos* means “uninhabited, empty, desolate” (“Eremos”). Thus, the path of “ruin” serves to indicate the Hermit’s own eventual fate, confirmed in his namelessness, as the prospect of this pastoral scene is eventually rendered impossible.

However, in this moment, as both men “reclined on the velvet turf,” the Hermit observes: “With the setting of that sun, whose glories I then admired, set my felicity on earth” (Lathom 79). In that instance, he “felt sensations of the most exquisite happiness” (79). The only moment throughout the Hermit’s narration where the notion of happiness “on earth” is considered is here with Dulac beside him. Such idealism is soon threatened

when, returning to this same spot at sunset with Dulac’s nephew Bertrand, the man who will later imprison him, the Hermit observes, “A part seemed now to be vanishing, for the ingenious purpose of fixing the attention more strongly on that which was visible” (79). In this idea of “vanishing,” or “disappearing,” from the Latin *evanescere* or “die away,” the Hermit’s uninhibited path is once more stressed, as Lathom cannot foresee a future in which the Hermit can retain such “sensations of exquisite happiness” (“Evanescere”). Furthermore, both visits to the lake, although they occur on the same day, are described as taking place at sunset. While this inconsistency in time may be nothing more than Lathom’s error, the strong contrast of these two scenes suggests the inner struggle of the Hermit, recalling Punter’s notion of the “secrecy and display” present in Lathom’s own biography.

Notions of secrecy are furthered in the burgeoning relationship between the Hermit and Dulac, perhaps most noticeably in the scene that takes place prior to their retiring for bed, and which depicts them as the sole inhabitants of the mansion, despite the noted presence of others. After returning to the castle, Dulac notices the Hermit’s fatigue and offers him a drink. The Hermit recalls that he “drank with pleasure of the cup as it went around,” finding himself “refreshed and exhilarated” (Lathom 80). The evening soon passes “with the same harmony and satisfaction that the former one had done” and “about the same time as the preceding night,” they “retired to rest” (80). Allen Whitlock Grove, whom Punter names as “one of Lathom’s few commentators to date,” argues the “important presence” of this scene, writing that “Lathom describes the Hermit and his companion going to bed in a realistic...loving language absent elsewhere in the novel” and that such “minute details create a sense of domesticity and affection” (Grove qtd. in Punter xviii). Punter furthers this argument, writing that the sharing of a bed “might be enough to raise the issue of the homoerotic liaison, even without the additional rites of bloodshed, shame and melancholy with which Lathom addresses the aftermath” (Punter xviii). The bloodshed in question comes later that same night, when the Hermit wakes to discover that he has begun to “bleed violently at the nose” and although he “endeavored in vain for some time to stop the flowing blood,” he is unable to do so (Lathom 80).

While Punter attributes the blood to “rape and death” or a possibility of “re-birth,” Julia Peakman argues that narratives involving fluid point “to the impos-

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sibility of containing excess bodily fluids in relation to sexual outpourings as bodily transgressions,” coinciding with the “eighteenth-century belief that the body would go its own way, despite any constraints placed upon it” (xviii; 29). An entry from an eighteenth-century encyclopedia corroborates this idea, explaining that “nature, they say, left to herself causes hemorrhages...we are not always alert to the fact that nature follows particular laws in its system of “drainage,” that nature chooses precise times to act” (*Encyclopedia* qtd. in Maccubin 47). Read in this context, the Hermit’s nosebleed becomes symbolic of nature’s response to the “bodily transgressions” that society demands be kept “silent.” Therefore, the “flowing blood” is representative of the Hermit’s inability to “stop” that which contemporary law sought to keep “silent,” transforming the scene beyond simply a rite of a passage and into a scene of protest. It is only when the Hermit draws a bucket of water that “the cold soon produced the desired effect of stopping the blood” (Lathom 80). However, rather than the “shame” that Punter associates with this act, the conversation leading to the Hermit’s decision to wash away the blood hints at motivations of self-preservation as opposed to guilt (xviii).

Learning of the Hermit’s situation, Dulac “advised” him “to go and wash at the well, in a small yard adjoining to the garden,” questioning “if [the Hermit] had ever opened the door which led out of the house into the garden?” (Lathom 80). Upon the Hermit’s return, Dulac once again questions “if [the Hermit] had shut the outward door?” (80). Here, Dulac, whose conversation the Hermit has previously acknowledged to be “instructive” in nature, seems to be engaging in argot specific to sodomites, as he advises the Hermit how to accomplish a task in secrecy. Norton writes that argot first emerged in the beginning of the eighteenth century, and here Dulac’s repeated insistence that the “outer,” or “back,” door be locked is significant in that, towards the end of the century, argot used to define sodomites referring to them as “gentlemen of the backdoor” (“A Critique”). The presence of a secret language that keeps silent the true meaning of Dulac’s repeated questioning, alongside his urgency that the Hermit should be able to enter and exit the garden without the notice of others, can be read in light of contemporary anxieties of being associated with sodomy. Such secrecy recalls the need to keep “silent” or “out of public view” as any association with sodomy had the power to ruin one’s reputation (Goldsmith 39). Indeed, Netta Murray Goldsmith writes, “short of being

put to death, a man could suffer no worse fate than to be publicly branded a sodomite” (39).

Later, when Dulac’s nieces visit their Uncle’s bedroom and return with “terror painted on their countenances” exclaiming “that [their] Uncle’s bed was all over blood!” the Hermit “blushes” and attempts to explain to the family the source of the bloody sheets (Lathom 81). Realizing that Dulac’s family suspects him of harming the now missing Dulac, the Hermit finds “the door was now locked upon [him], to prevent [his] leaving the house” (82). The family’s reaction to Dulac’s disappearance, coupled with the “terror” or “great fear” that Dulac’s nieces experience, is symbolic of eighteenth-century anxieties about sodomy. Their decision to “lock” up the Hermit indulges in the eighteenth-century fear that sodomy was something that could be caught and then spread. Exemplified in the warning that Dulac’s nephew issues the Hermit—“tremble, young man; for offended justice is diligent in detecting the breakers of her law”—the family, now transformed into representations of this law, must “confine” the Hermit, just as the courts “confined” the “secret” of sodomy within the walls of the courthouse (82). The Hermit’s failure to “declare his innocence,” as “astonishment prevented [his] utterance,” becomes illustrative of the powerlessness of the sodomite to speak within a legal tradition “that required the speaker to proceed according to a command to remain silent” (82). Following his initial shock, the Hermit makes several attempts to explain the particulars of the previous night, but despite the Hermit asking the family “to hear [his] vindication,” his words are rendered ineffectual as they “did not seem to attend to [the Hermit], nor [he] believe listened” (82). Similar, then, to the narratives discussed in the previous chapter, the Hermit’s narrative undergoes a process of misrepresentation, as the family of Dulac, and therefore its patriarchal head, Bertrand, impose their own interpretation onto his testimony. For, as the Hermit’s narrative threatens eighteenth-century ideology in its (sodomitical) contents, it is condemned and reconstructed into something “monstrous” in nature. Here, this monstrosity is confirmed when the Hermit is found with Dulac’s knife, “open, and bloody,” upon his person—indicating that his crime is now similarly “open” or “exposed” to the public—along with an ensuing guilty verdict, as the Hermit relates “my trial was short, and I heard myself condemned to die” (83-84).

Eighteenth-century law demanded proof of penetration and emission in order to convict one of sodomy

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(Goldsmith 34). Here, there is evidence of emission in the bodily fluid of blood and penetration in the symbolic form of the bloody knife. The Hermit's crime now "exposed" to the public, coupled with Bertrand's previous refusal to hear his words, confirms the Hermit's loss of identity as, publicly associated with his crime, he has been transformed into "the wrongful act" that eighteenth-century law demanded be "named by way of silence." In light of such evidence, the family "bound [him] their prisoner" in an attempt to contain the threat that sodomitical practice posed to "the order of things," as defined by patriarchal law (Lathom 83). Eventually, the Hermit is sentenced to life as a slave on the island of Corsica, once more reinforcing the idea of sodomy as something to be contained and kept away from society. After twenty-two years, the Hermit is reunited with Dulac, who relates his own tale of kidnap and imprisonment by "suspicious characters" who had entered the house "by the door from the garden" (85). The reference to the garden door recalls the "instructions" given on that last night and suggests that the reason for their dual suffering can be located in the impossibility of keeping their secret silent, thereby ensuring that the path of happiness glimpsed on their first day together remains unattainable. That this path will be denied to them is reinforced on their journey home, when their ship encounters a "violent" storm and the vessel is "split into two equal parts" (88). The Hermit is forced to watch as the ship is "swallowed up in a whirlpool," once more recalling the "fatal implications" of the lake imagery that the Hermit's association with Dulac forewarned. In this moment, he loses Dulac, observing that "he had vanished from my sight...Dulac was gone for ever" (88). Thus, Dulac (and their sodomitical relationship) remains firmly ensconced within the temporally displaced narrative, and thereby separate from the primary (patriarchal) story. Lathom's refusal to admit either the Hermit or Dulac to the first narrative suggests the impossibility of their remittance to society, for, as convicts (guilty of sodomy) the evidence of their crime (their relationship) is now "open" and "exposed" to the public.

The loss of Dulac "is the completion of [the Hermit's] misery", and he "had no interest in the world, but rather a wish to secret [himself] from it" (88-89). Unable to prove his innocence to Dulac's family, the Hermit's subsequent inability to return to his former life confirms the idea of his identity as intrinsically linked with his crime. The impossibility of autonomy is further rein-

forced in the Hermit's lack of possessions, as he notes that upon his arrival back home, he "possessed nothing in the world, for [his] property had been confiscated on [his] receiving sentence of banishment" (89-90). The one thing the Hermit does retain is his story and, in the presence of Lauretta, a woman who has no voice in the dictation of patriarchal law and therefore does not demand his crime be "named by way of silence," the Hermit is at last permitted to speak. However, because of patriarchal society's insistence that both factions remain silent, his words are rendered ineffectual and the only prospect of autonomy is presented in his eventual death. The Hermit's body is never buried: instead, it is left within his hermitage, once more emphasizing the refusal of society to separate the Hermit from his crime. Thus, Lathom suggests the impossibility of men associated with sodomy being able to enter back into society, perhaps anticipating his own eventual exile to Scotland in order to start anew in a place where he was unknown. Read against the prior scene where the Hermit is presented with two different paths, the pastoral scene that "afforded a prospect of many leagues in extent" might suggest the opportunity of happiness and autonomy in a country abroad (hinted at in the "many leagues"), while the path of loneliness and ruin is limited in its immediacy and implies the impossibility of happiness to those who remain.

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## Legal Fictions: Gothic and the Spectre of the Law in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly; or Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*

Justin D Edwards

In *Law and Letters in American Culture* (1984), Robert A. Ferguson asserts that the relationship between law and literature is vital for understanding America's first major Gothic novelist, Charles Brockden Brown. Ferguson writes that in 1793 "Brown rejected the law as his profession after six years study in the Philadelphia law office of Alexander Wilcocks" in favor of writing fiction (129). Following this career change, Brown feverishly wrote several Gothic novels, including *Wieland* (1798), *Ormond* (1799), *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800), *Edgar Huntly; or Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799) and *The Memoirs of Stephen Calvert* (1799-1800). Building on Ferguson's biographical comments about Brown's education and working life, I read *Edgar Huntly* as a Gothic novel that meditates upon the theoretical trajectories of the law in the United States. This approach is particularly fruitful not only because it strays into new territory in Brown criticism, but also because it adds a theoretical dimension to the close readings of *Edgar Huntly* by critics such as Sidney J. Krause and Jared Gardner who discuss the novel in the context of the US laws arising out of the "Elm Treaty" and "Walking Purchase," as well as the Alien and Sedition Acts.<sup>1</sup> Instead of going over the ground covered by Krause and Jared, I suggest that the wilderness of *Edgar Huntly* lies beyond the order of the law—a wilderness where the foundations of legal discourse are exposed as unfounded.

If criminality is law breaking and transgression is defiance that includes disgust and desire, then Brown's fiction

1 By placing *Edgar Huntly* in the context of the "Elm Treaty" (1682) and the "Walking Purchase" (1737), Krause traces the colonial history of America that leads to Brown's representations of violence between natives and Europeans. Krause concludes that Brown's fiction was a contemplation on the ethical implications of imperial conflict and colonial laws that disenfranchised Native American peoples and cultures. In the end, Krause suggests that the Gothic nightmare of *Edgar Huntly* displaces the guilt of the generation of Americans who perpetrated this violence as well as those who inherited a Republic founded on bloodshed. Gardner offers a slightly different approach to the novel. He writes that *Edgar Huntly* is "a contribution to the discourse of identity surrounding the Alien and Sedition Acts" and highlights "the rhetoric of savagery in the anti-alien polemics of the late 1790s" (432).

explores the ways in which the social order – the political construction of bourgeois democracy – is repeatedly transgressed. However, the law in *Edgar Huntly* is also depicted as attempting to contain transgressions by fixing social boundaries along clear limits. In so doing, legal procedures should stabilize chaos within a specific area by legislating clear-cut jurisdictions to establish stable notions of identity; after all, the law's single axis framework relies upon maintaining categories of identity (the innocent and the guilty) within a specific jurisdiction. Within this understanding of the law, borders must be clearly marked out to determine who has the authority within a particular region, avoiding the ambiguities of identificatory abstractions that would undermine the law's power as law. The law, within the authority of its jurisdiction, is forced to disavow the intricacies of identity by reducing and denying the complexities of signification inherent to the self. The repression of such complexities, though, threatens to return in the form of an uncontrollable and transgressive figure that renegotiates power by undermining binary structures. *Edgar Huntly* participates in this destabilizing process by representing a powerful challenge to the logic of the law: the text produces transgressive bodies that are always before or beyond the law. As a result, the novel comprises more than a narrative obsessed with violence, rage, brutality, murder and the uncanny; it is also the story of the ways in which the law sets up its own frustration; a story that highlights the lawful language that supports the social order, while simultaneously transgressing the Enlightenment principles of reason and logic upon which the law is conceived. Brown's text, then, challenges the letter of the law by asking if we can ever separate innocence from guilt, justice from corruption, punishment from tyranny, victimizer from victimized.

According to the literary critic Sue Chaplin, "the Gothic exposes not only the 'fragility' of law, but its radical indeterminacy, impropriety and hauntedness" (4). This is consistent with my reading of *Edgar Huntly* wherein the legal process of bringing the guilty to justice functions as

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an attempt to de-gothicize the Gothic narratives of violence, murder, genocide, rape and mental breakdown. This might be achieved by clearly identifying the transgressor and confining his transgressions to the margins (through incarceration, execution or exile). In this, the violent murders foregrounded throughout the text could be, under the weight of the law, erased and normality restored. If this were achievable, then transgressions might be, according to legal metanarratives, a consequence of the extreme deformations of the participants in the crime. Throughout the novel, though, there are no clear-cut oppositions between law and law-breaker, authority and subject. The complexity of the narrative itself serves to displace the authority of the law, and any attempts to fix or define guilt are frustrated by the very constraints that the law ascribes to itself.

In *Edgar Huntly*, the law is located in time and is thought to provide order for a time. But it is precisely because this order is in time that a mystery – indeed, a spectre – arises when the law is no longer self-evident and appears only as the absence of the temporal priority of the law's foundation. The writing of the law includes a mysterious quality; it is transformed into a self-evident foundation, and it is the self-evidence of law as substance that supports the law's claim that it is the law because it is the law. But since the knot of the law is tied up with time, jurisdictions, subjectivities and texts, we must also recognize that the law's claim to self-evidence is irrational. And if the knot of the law is unraveled, it will not be through an orientation based on time or space, for these are no longer locations that are able to support a specific direction.

In the opening chapters of *Edgar Huntly*, Edgar attempts to unravel the mystery of the murder of his friend, Waldegrave. Framed as a letter to Waldegrave's sister, Edgar writes the story of the crime and identifies himself as the detective who is anxious to discover "the author of this guilt" (645). But both his investigation and his writing become tied up in knots: just as he finds it difficult to arrange his words "without indistinctness and confusion," he is "full of tumult and dismay" when he tries to "ascertain the hand who killed [his] friend" (643, 645). Despite claims to the contrary, Edgar does not find a light that bursts upon this ignorance; enlightenment remains at bay, and he is forced to stumble in the dark, searching for clues that will untangle the knotty crime. His inability to do so offers a glimpse at the entanglement of devolution, for the plot signals the disintegration of the enlightened society of the new American republic and the dissolution of the logical ground upon which the disentanglement could take place. Edgar's obsessive pursuit of Clithero, his prime suspect

in the homicide, is an attempt at barring against dissolution by maintaining the law; he assures Waldegrave's sister that the murder must not go unpunished, that it is his duty to uphold the enlightened principles of honour and justice. But his pursuit terminates in a dead-end: he finds himself lost in the nightmarish landscape of an American wilderness, a place where there is no hope of finding the transgressor, no means of imposing order on the frenzy of a relentless search. Edgar's confusion is so great that he cannot even name or describe the terrain upon which he comes to conduct his investigation. His senses become overwhelmed with events whose significance cannot be read; everything is illegible: "My judgment was, for a time, sunk into imbecility and confusion," he tells us, "my mind was full of the images unavoidably suggested by [Clithero's] tale, but they existed in a kind of chaos" (718).<sup>2</sup>

Edgar is not cut out for detective work. His terrifying sense of disorientation only pushes him further toward the haunted realm of his suspect's somnambulism. For by investigating Clithero and following him into a lawless wilderness, Edgar begins to mimic the actions of the transgressor. He begins to sleepwalk and, as such, he blurs the boundary that separates the self from the other:

Clithero had buried his treasure with his own hands, as mine had been secreted by myself; but both acts had been performed during sleep. The deed was neither prompted by the will nor noticed by the senses of him by whom it was done. Disastrous and humiliating is the state of man! By his own hands is constructed the mass of misery and error on which his steps are forever involved. (883)

This passage connects Edgar and Clithero. As sleepwalkers, these characters are cut from the same cloth; they cannot be held responsible for their actions, thus folding the detective into the suspect, the police into the criminal, the innocent into the guilty. But Edgar also erases the difference between himself and Clithero by connecting his sleepwalking to the

<sup>2</sup> Here, my reading builds upon Scott Bradfield's assertion that "Edgar's search for Waldegrave's murderer leads him away from any practical solution to the crime." Bradfield is correct in pointing out that "every narrative gambit leads Edgar not to any believable resolution but to yet another eccentric diversion" (24). However, this reading falls short of making any connections between what he calls the text's "circuitous maze of clues" and its representation of American jurisprudence.

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rest of mankind. Such a movement foregrounds the novel's principal metaphor: everyone is sleepwalking through life, directed by invisible and overpowering forces of destiny, powerless to circumvent the destruction that lurks in the darkness. Under these circumstances, Edgar asks, to what extent is the criminal responsible for his transgressions? If a criminal act is committed while asleep and not prompted by will, then how should the crime be judged? And, by extension, if everyone is "sleepwalking" through life, then is it ever possible to judge someone for his or her crimes?

The implication is that everyone is guilty. But because actions are beyond the control of the individual, it is difficult, if not impossible, to judge the other. This follows on the legal theory of Edward Coke, an important voice in the formation of early US law, when he states the following: "The punishment of a man who is deprived of reason and understanding cannot be an example to others. No felony or murder can be committed without a felonious intent and purpose...but [a person who] cannot understand what he is doing, and deprived of will and reason, cannot have a felonious intent" (quoted in Hutchings 58-9). Reflecting this idea, Brown's narrative captures Clithero's lack of control even before he begins sleepwalking. In Ireland, for instance, he murders Waitte, his patroness's evil twin, in an act of self-defense. But instead of condemning Clithero for the crime, Edgar asserts that Clithero "was not concerned in this transaction. He acted in obedience to an impulse which he could not control or resist" (719). However, after involuntarily committing this murder, Clithero comes under another mysterious spell: he becomes convinced that he must murder his patroness, Mrs. Lorimer, in order to save her from the tragic news of her brother's death. One unwilling murder leads to another, for when he enters her chamber and lifts the knife, Clithero experiences his "limbs [being] guided to the bloody office by a power foreign and superior [to his own]" (713). In this crime (as in the murder of Waitte), the narrator implies that Clithero was intending to carry out the atrocity while awake. But in both cases, Edgar absolves Clithero of the transgressions, citing the overwhelming force that robbed the suspect of all motives and the command of his actions. "The crime," Edgar concludes, "originated in those limitations which nature imposed upon human faculties. Proofs of a just intention are all that are requisite to exempt us from blame" (719). Edgar's message is loud and clear: Clithero did not intend to commit the murders, so he cannot be held responsible for the crimes.

With this ruling, Edgar moves from detective to judge and he presents a decision that indicates the groundless foundation of a new Republic. If the citizens of this country have

no control over their fate, Edgar prompts, then who has the power or authority to create a new nation? How can laws be written and enforced to offer a jurisdiction upon which a new state can be founded? And how is it possible to start afresh in a new land when its citizens have no control over their individual experiences or common fates? These questions highlight the fact that the law is, on the one hand, a forceful discourse of foundation that has the power to conjure order, security and resolution to a jurisdiction (such as a new Republic). On the other hand, though, the law's status is bound up in a discourse of mystery that rarely provides the resolution that it assumes, for questions of legal language are conflated with the language of duplicity. The law in *Edgar Huntly* is, in short, cited as a primary basis for the "reality" of "America," even while the law is exposed as an elaborate artifice based on the manipulation of language and discourse.

The lack of free will experienced by the characters is also connected to a past that is seen to haunt the present. Edgar, for instance, realizes that he, like other Americans, will always remain haunted and controlled by the crimes of history: Edgar will continue to be visited by the ghost of Waldegrave, just as Clithero will always be haunted by the murders in Ireland. Likewise, Sarsfield is unable to find refuge in America; he cannot escape the traumas of the past. For when Sarsfield and his new wife arrive in America to begin a new life (after suffering from Clithero's transgressions), they are horrified to discover that they have not escaped him. "Clithero!" Sarsfield exclaims, "Curses light upon thy lips for having uttered that detested name! Thousands of miles have I flown to shun the hearing of it. Is the madman here?" (870). In passages like this, *Edgar Huntly* depicts characters who have tried to free themselves from dark crimes only to find that in America the past is inescapable. In the end, they carry crimes with them, and this suggests that, as Leslie Fiedler reminds us, "evil did not remain with the world that had been left behind – but stayed alive in the human heart, which had come the long way to America only to confront the horrifying image of itself" (127).

The United States is not a place of law and order. Nor is it represented as a sanctuary from the bloody crimes committed in Europe, offering an alternative to the exceedingly woeful present caused by the horrors of history. The new republic of *Edgar Huntly* offers no redemption or regeneration. In fact, the text ends not with re-birth or even new birth, but with the death of Mrs. Sarsfield's unborn child when the shock of Clithero's presence results in a miscarriage. Although Mr. Sarsfield ends the novel declaring this to "be the last arrow in the quiver of adversity," the reader is left to wonder if the lack

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of justice, law and punishment in the text could ever lead to a conclusion comprised of absolution and contentment (898). The crimes are left unresolved, and the text suggests that transgressions in the past will always haunt the victim and the victimizer.

This lack of resolution continues when Edgar is unable to heal his troubled psyche after his trial in the wilderness of the frontier. According to Jeffrey Weinstock, the frontier – indeed, “Frontier Gothic” – “is arguably the original American Gothic symbol”; after all, this land was covered by forest in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and as a result the nation was a liminal space between civilization (Europe) and the great wilderness to the west, “between the real and the fantastic” (29, 37). It is here that Edgar’s mind has been penetrated by a series of spectres, all of which come to constitute his own personal demons: “Solitude and sleep are now no more than the signals to summon up a tribe of ugly phantoms. Famine, and blindness, and death, and savage enemies, never fail to be conjured up by the silence and darkness of the night” (745). The words “tribe” and “savage” are significant in this passage. For in this place of “settlement” and “removal,” the disorder of lawlessness reigns supreme; the citizens of the new nation are unable to exorcise the demons that haunt them at every turn.

In *Edgar Huntly*, the Enlightenment rationalism upon which the modern law is based proves inadequate for coping with the horrors of everyday life. The rationalism that engendered the nation’s founding legal document cannot shed light on the darkness of Edgar’s wilderness. Instead, Edgar is left to flounder in the dark caves of his psyche, a place where nothing is what it seems to be, a place where empirical observation is useless. It is this disorder, this breakdown of empiricism, which impedes Edgar’s investigation into Waldgrave’s murder. For Edgar’s observations of Clithero conjure a series of shifting impressions that are never clarified or resolved. Edgar’s first impression is that Clithero has committed the crime, but the prime suspect’s “confession” convinces Edgar that the man is innocent and, as a result, he judges Clithero to be the guiltless victim of a tragic fate. But the “truth” remains an invoked absence: Edgar is frustrated by his inability to determine veracity and he becomes increasingly bewildered by his errors in judgment. Edgar’s short-sighted vision is further impeded by Clithero’s confession, for the reader soon becomes aware that Clithero is a bloodthirsty villain who should “be fettered and imprisoned as the most atrocious criminal” (896). Here, the correctives of law and punishment are cited as a possible way to restore order. But Edgar ultimately realizes

that such correctives require clear comprehension and an empirical understanding of the crimes committed, both of which remain absent in this unfathomable wilderness.

Yet the unfathomable wilderness is juxtaposed to the comforting and homely space of the Huntly farm. This contrast represents a disabling fracture that runs through the body of the land. There is a dividing line, a physical and epistemological separation, which fractures the presumably known principles of US “civilization” from the mysterious territories of a geographical and conceptual frontier. However, the Huntly farm, which is meant to map the landscape into a series of oppositions (internal and external, us and them, civilization and wilderness), is not steadfast or wholly contained. Rather, it gestures toward a series of jurisdictions that are not altogether fixed or ordered by the law. The Huntly farm and Edgar’s chamber is, for instance, thought to be violated by an intruder, and the manuscript composed by Waldegrave, hidden in Edgar’s writing desk, is presumed to be stolen. Here, the criminal is an apparition, a phantom presence, who moves within Edgar’s home and forces him (and others) to reconceptualize the house as a potentially unsafe dwelling. The stranger who penetrates the borders of the house calls attention to the fragility of the spatial boundaries separating “civilization” from “wilderness,” law from lawlessness, homely from unhomely. This highlights several anxieties about borders, or rather the absence of them, and who, if anyone, can be “at home” in the strange place of the new republic. The home on the frontier, then, disrupts borders and binary oppositions: it is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, inside and outside, secure and insecure. In this, the border separating the division between the foreign wilderness from the home ground of the new republic is called into question. Home ground becomes a foreign territory, and stable language and meaning begin to erode as the ordering principles of the law prove to be inadequate. The effect of these impossible conjunctions, this inconceivable distortion of boundaries and a secure sense of place, is to inspire anxiety and terror, for the signs that establish identities as lucid and transparent become obscure and opaque.<sup>3</sup>

It is here that the relationship between the law and the homely nation is at its most vulnerable. For while the

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Hinds persuasively argues that there is an intimate connection between Brown’s representations of space and the discursive form of the novel. The chaotic and confusing space of the wilderness is, she states, reflected in the narrative voice that is “confused to the point of incoherence” (110). The narrative discontinuities embody the disorienting space wherein Edgar finds himself.

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mapping of the land into various jurisdictions highlights law and order, the displacements and confusions played out on this terrain call attention to the fiction of the clear fixities and certainties required by the law. Clithero is able to turn the wilderness into his home; but he does so in an uncanny way, moving unseen and sheltered by the threatening landscape that surrounds him. Likewise, Clithero's exile is not enforced; he moves back and forth between the wilderness and the cultivated farms of Norwalk. His ghostly movement, his haunting presence, poses a threat that he might continue to lurk within the precincts of the Norwalk territory with a view to the destruction of all that it contains. He thus remains an invasive figure who gestures toward a breakdown in the social order; he is a spectre who haunts the collective imagination of those who inhabit this unhomey place.

Clithero's spectral movement raises a number of questions about space, place and identity. After all, Edgar cannot identify Clithero's "true" character: he refers to Clithero as murderer and victim, criminal and lawful, guilty and innocent. Such confusion suggests Edgar's reticence to fully grasp a sense of lawfulness from lawlessness, confession from cover-up. The principles of the law become hazy on the edge of this frontier, and even the imposition of a sense of order (through the implementation of laws protecting private property) is depicted as a desperate attempt to impose a sense of "homeliness" on a foreign territory. From this perspective, the maintainance of order is not just a byproduct of a fantasy or an illusion; it is also an uncanny enactment of the predicament of displacement that is accompanied by a sense of alienation and foreignness that marks the characters' relationship to the new republic.<sup>4</sup>

This leads back to a question that haunts *Edgar Huntly*: how can one feel at home in a foreign "homeland"? Edgar's sudden appearance in the wilderness makes him, like Clithero, an exile who is confronted with the foreignness of home. Edgar might claim Norwalk to be his homeground, but the landscape surrounding his homely space is an uncanny and ghostly region that is vulnerable to hostility and destruction. The narrator indicates that the land "originally belonged to the tribe of Delawares or Lennilennapee" until the "perpetual encroachments of the English colonists" eventually appropri-

ated the districts "within the dominions of that nation" (820). The dark history of Indian removal, then, casts a spectre over Norwalk, so that maintaining legal possession of the land requires the violent enforcement of European laws in order to keep the return of the repressed at bay. However, on the frontier, the ghost is not only produced through the agonizing history of expunging the "Native." For the ghostly presence is also something which disturbs the coherent identities of the "haunter" and the "haunted," particularly when it is revealed that Edgar must also participate in the bloodthirsty killings of Natives. As a result, he mirrors those who haunt him; Edgar is forced to glimpse the absolute becoming of the Other through a slow growth that demonstrates the unstable nature of identity and marks the self as a process never to be completed.<sup>5</sup>

In *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha points to the shadowy figures that lie behind the writing of the nation as home: Bhabha explains that any conception of the nation is formulated in opposition to "the unheimlich (or uncanny) terror of the space or race of the Other" (2). Woven into the fabric of the nation are ghostly national imaginings that haunt the "home" from the modern darkness that accompanies Enlightenment secularism. The United States, like all modern nations, is constructed to cover over – to repress – the particular darkness of the ghostly Other conceived within an imaginary geography that is justified under the language of the law. In this context, Edgar confronts a new Republic that is conceived in juxtaposition to the particular darkness of a ghostly Other imagined within a fictitious geography of race, class and gender. After all, *Edgar Huntly* reflects the battered psyche of post-revolutionary America and the aftermath of colonial conquest. The memory of conquest and the attempts to reassert law and order in the form of a Constitution are seen to have tragic consequences for North American Native cultures, consequences for which the text's violent Indians seek revenge. But the laws in support of Indian displacement, removal and eradication – as seen in the "Elm Treaty" and "Walking Purchase" – haunt Edgar at every turn.

The spectre of the Other arises out of the deceptive and genocidal early American discourses of the treaties, laws and legislation adopted in regard to Native peoples. Thus,

4 Elizabeth Hinds points out that "the lawlessness out beyond the fringe of civilization" makes for conflicting land claims in which the Natives "act in response to white encroachment on their territory" (*Private* 140). This is a compelling argument because it highlights the fact that the Natives are acting in self-defense to protect their land and culture, thus mirroring Edgar's own plea of self-defense as he brutally murders five Native peoples.

5 Several critics have noted the irony of Edgar's characterization of the Natives as savages. For instance, Arthur Kimball notes that the Natives are "really foils for the savage potential of Brown's hero" (214). And William Hedges points out that every character in the novel is "a potential savage" and a potential murderer (133).

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the haunting presence of *Edgar Huntly's* nightmarish Natives speaks to the Euro-American anxieties concerning the distinction between justifiable killing and cold-blooded murder. On the one hand, the bloodthirsty violence of the Natives can be cited as a justification for Edgar's murderous responses, absolving him of criminal transgression on the grounds of self-defense.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Edgar is ensnared in and suspected of every act of felonious violence that takes place in the text. Even his testimony does not free him from guilt. In fact, his narrative is so subject to change, editing, omission, confusion, concealment and exposure that his words only further implicate him in the crimes. This is complicated by the fact that Edgar does not always see himself as justified in killing Indians; instead, he is a reluctant murderer, who is overwhelmed with the guilt of a cold-blooded killer. Upon firing his first bullet, he writes, "Horror, and compassion, and remorse were mingled into one sentiment and took possession of my heart" (815). But these emotions do not rouse him to halt his deadly actions: he shoots a bullet and finishes the slaughter with his bayonet. Once the crime has been committed, Edgar is once again stricken with horror: "I dropped the weapon and threw myself on the ground; overpowered by the horrors of the scene. Such are the deeds which perverse nature compels thousands of rational beings to perform and witness" (816).<sup>7</sup>

The implication is a colonising one: the rational being must battle the savageness of nature and slay it with brutal force. Otherwise, disorder and chaos will prevail to banish the imagined logic of the law to the darkness of the wilderness. It is here that *Edgar Huntly* dramatizes the ways in which the imposition of the Enlightenment principles of rationality, law and order, bring with them a ferocity and frenzy – a savageness – that must be enacted. To put this another way, the law relies upon enforcement and coercion. For the law to be effective, it must be enforced with the same force and violence

6 This characterization of North American Natives as war-mongering brutes reappears in Brown's *An Address to the Government of the United States, on the Cession of Louisiana to the French* (1803). In this pamphlet a Frenchman discusses the organization of slaves and Natives, "whose delight is war," into an army to overthrow the U.S. government (74).

7 John Carlos Rowe reads scenes like this one as representing the process of colonization and the recognition of the imperialist's savagery: "In *Edgar Huntly* [...] this threatening outside is psychically colonized as the work of culture matches that of negotiators like Thomas Penn, politicians like John Penn, and the surveyors and walkers who carried out their cheat of the Lenni-Lenape. In a similar manner, the cultural difference of the Lenni-Lenape is transformed from a society and economy that challenge the key terms of European individualism and property into a shadow reflection of the settler's own savagery" (50).

that it attempts to outlaw as a transgression. This reminds us of Derrida's reading of the "force of the law" and, more specifically, his claim that under the "enforceability of law [...] there is no such law (droit) that does not imply in itself, the analytic structure of its concept, the possibility of being 'enforced,' applied by force" (6). Here, Derrida poses an important question that is played out in the savage law enforcement of *Edgar Huntly*: how can we distinguish the force of the law from the violence that we deem to be unjust? What difference is there between a force that is imagined to be just (or at least legitimate) and an unjust violence? Or, as Derrida writes, "how are we to distinguish between the force of law of legitimate power and the supposed originary violence that must have established this authority and could not itself have been authorized by any anterior legitimacy so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal – or, others would quickly say, neither just nor unjust" ("Force" 6).

But in *Edgar Huntly* the Natives are not the only ones to experience the violence of the law. Clithero is also faced with its force: his arrest and detention requires the same brutality he inflicts upon others. "You will imagine," Sarsefield says of Clithero's arrest, "that his strong, but perverted reason exclaimed loudly against the injustice of his treatment. It was easy for him to outreason his antagonist, and *nothing but force* could subdue his opposition" (897; my emphasis). In this passage, Brown addresses the intrinsic structure of the law as a performance of force. Those who have the power to enforce the law also have the power to restrain those who are said to transgress the law's strict boundaries. But if, as I suggest, the foundation of the law is by definition unfounded, then the law's only claim to the justifiable violence of restraint is in its own self-referential language. This means that the performative force of the law must also be an interpretive force. For the law's "very moment of foundation or institution [...] would consist of a coup de force, of a performative and therefore interpretive violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and no previous law with its founding anterior moment could guarantee or contradict or invalidate" (Derrida, "Force" 13).

Law and order are always haunted by their own transgression and disorder. It is within this trajectory that a spectre emerges to haunt the homely house of the law, and it is here, in this house, that the spirit of the law exists as a Gothic phantom. This haunting process puts into play a transgression wherein the familiarity of familiar structures is disrupted by gaps and dislocations. A spectre, then, is always part of the lawful forms we inhabit, particularly those structures we mistakenly believe to be unified or complete. Likewise, as we

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have seen, the homely space of America – founded upon legal statutes – is faced with an uncanny internal displacement that belongs intimately to its own domestic scene. This situation foregrounds the spectral gaps within the homely nation by calling attention to the problematic of locating a home within a new republic: who is master of this house? And who has the jurisdiction to compose the law of the land? Edgar may indeed inhabit America, he may be housed within its borders, but the spectre of the other is incorporated into the very fabric of the dwelling, even as its otherness both exceeds and serves in the determination of the identity of the place. Edgar, in effect, inhabits a home where he is always displaced by a ghostly alterity.

In Edgar's nightmare world, the home is not a refuge, but a gruesome place where one is literally not even safe in one's own bed. Sleep renders one doubly vulnerable, both to one's own unconscious actions, and to the violence of others. Edgar's parents are killed by Indians as they sleep in their home: "My parents and an infant child," Edgar tells us, "were murdered in their beds; the house was pillaged, and then burnt to the ground" (803). Likewise, during Edgar's journey through the countryside, he witnesses deeply disturbing images of domesticity, reinforcing the sense that one is never safe, not even at home. Here, the materialization of the uncanny persists in dislodging the domestic realm; the house is the family home and the potential crypt, a comforting shelter and a death chamber. What is more perplexing is that this dislodging juxtaposition is not alien to familiar spaces, even if it is other, but it is as much a part of the home as anything else. The figure of the house, as a dislocated and haunted structure becomes the terrain upon which the blurring of boundaries is given its most literal depiction. It is here that Edgar encounters the ghostly presence of Waldegrave and a past that has made and unmade his life; it is here that the phantasmatic acquires a manifestation in the form of a representation of that which is unrepresentable; and it is here that we see the spectralized figure of a law that has no jurisdiction, for the boundaries of the house are always penetrable and porous.

Such penetrability illustrates the lawlessness of the text's complex depiction of the nation as home. But this instability also points to the unstable nature of the legal text. For Edgar Huntly shows that a body of law is governed by a vast body of texts. Indeed, the language of the law cannot be divorced from the laws of language and, as a result, legal documents are not exempt from the play of signifiers that may result in non-communication. If language produces a multiplicity of meanings that potentially work against each other,

then the play of signs in legal language may overdetermine meaning. This, of course, disestablishes the interpretability of statutory and legal texts, leaving us with a spectre of truth that is always invoked but perpetually absent. Brown's text thus explores the spectrality of that which appears in the gap between the positivist conventions of the law and the epistemological investigation necessary for establishing "truth." The narration speaks of the limits of determination, a legal spectrality, in which the law is everything and nothing, thus underlining the possibilities and limitations of idealization and conceptualization. In *Edgar Huntly*, the law is a spectre precisely because it claims authority while resisting conceptualization by exceeding any clear-cut definitions or interpretations. When it comes to the law, we cannot assume the coherence of identification or determination; the epistemological modes of inquiry upon which the law determines the binary logic of guilt or innocence (resulting in the apparent finality and closure of judgment and sentencing) are resisted in Brown's text. And we are haunted by the spectre of a non-dialectical figure, a ghostly presence that appears before us at the very limit to which interpretation and identification can go.

*Edgar Huntly* picks up on this spectrality by showing that the law is not necessarily grounded in the terrain that it is meant to order; it is imagined to be firmly secured within a fixed site. The law is ungrounded, for it has no external authorization outside of the citation of its own authority. Having said this, *Edgar Huntly* also shows how legal procedures have real effects beyond their own citationality: the law asserts power in places where it imagines the need for order and control, consigning the rest of experience, what the law sees as chaos, to the dark realm of the wilderness (44). We often conceive of spectrality as internal, mental entities, but Brown's text enables us to glimpse ghosts as public figures. In this, spectrality haunts the individual and also communicates with a larger group. These shared ghosts – our shared fears and anxieties – are often figures of history, power and the law. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida puts this quite succinctly when he asserts that "Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (37). And here Derrida points to the fact that hegemonic power – the dominance of one group over another – is structured around a series of ghosts. For the hierarchies of power and, by extension, the laws that structure our lives are themselves ghostly. The power of the law is thus disembodied, nonmaterial, and somehow illusory. But the effect of the law is undeniably real, for the social construction of power through the law implies that these hegemonic forces are built on his-

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tory, memory, fear and anxiety. Or, as Renée Bergland argues, “the politics of the national, the racial, the classed, and the gendered are the politics of memory and false memory [that] are also, necessarily, the politics of spectrality” (6).<sup>8</sup>

The violence of a transgression is the double of the violence of the enforced law, and any judiciary discourse pertaining to the role of metalanguage in relation to the performativity of institutive language faces a ghostly silence. In the end, the origin of authority – the foundation or ground – is absent and, as a result, the position of the law cannot rest on anything but itself: it is a violence without ground. But this is not to say that the law is itself unjust or illegal, for it is not legal or illegal in its founding moment because it exceeds the opposition between founded and unfounded. To put this another way, the law claims to exercise in the name of justice and holds that justice is required to establish itself in the name of the law that needs to be enforced. But such a negotiation is difficult and unstable, for it suggests that the law is always slippery and undeterminable; it can never distinguish itself from the transgression it attempts to police. It is here that the law is haunted by the ghost of the undecidable. Law is based on interpretation and even calculation, a process that must decide between two undecideables, two singular and heterogeneous rules. Under the law, every decision must go through the ordeal of the undecidable and once it has reached that stage it has again followed a rule, invented and reinvented it, and therefore is no longer presently just. “That is why,” Derri-da writes, “the undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost – but an essential ghost – in every decision, in every event of decision. Its ghostliness deconstructs from within any assurance of presence, any certitude or any supported criteriology that would assure us of the justice of a decision” (“Force” 25).

Edgar Huntly gestures toward such undecideability by placing Edgar in the wilderness beyond binary oppositions and the realm of assurance. For Edgar blurs demarcations and signs by complicating the lawful rhetoric of the frontier, a space of physical conflict based on cultural difference. But this space offers a significant alternative to the discourses of an imagined legal clarity: it is a space where Edgar is immersed in slippery definitions, a place in which the boundary between

self and other starts to erode. For it is here that the definitions of Edgar’s very identity prove to be undecideable: he is mistaken for a North American Native, and he loses touch with himself in his bouts of sleepwalking. To become part of this new landscape, Edgar must remake himself through the unlawful Native images of savagery that he imagines to constitute the Indigene. The narrative thus ruptures the legal distinctions separating Euro-Americans from Native Americans, a rupture that eradicates the very discourses of difference that have socially and legally defined the two groups. This, then, produces an uncanny representation of subjectivity that is hopelessly fragile and unstable. Edgar is uncanny precisely because his “Nativeness” blurs that which is familiar to other Americans, namely his Euro-American self. The externalized unheimlich space then becomes internalized as part of the geography of the self, and Edgar’s transformation takes place on the ground of undecideability, a place in which characters are rarely in control of the legal boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, that would secure a fixed position.

If the effacement of the limits between self and other is a common characteristic of spectrality, then Edgar’s journey through the wilderness pivots on identificatory ambiguity, suggesting that the borders between self and other are absent from the scene of unlawful regions (21). The internalization of this spectrality, during Edgar’s voyage into the wilderness, facilitates his “going native,” a process of dissolution of subject-object divisions so that the individual of one culture merges with another. More often than not this scenario takes place along a continuum that places the “civilized” traveller at one end of a spectrum and an “uncivilized” native at the other. In short, the traveller throws off his clear sense of subjectivity by joining the othered group. Imperial laws inform the rhetoric surrounding this dissolution, but ‘going native’ often also constitutes a utopian desire to go back and recover irreducible features of the psyche, body, land, and community – to reinhabit core experiences that are not restricted by the limits of the law (5). However, Edgar’s transformations are far from utopic; his movement from the so-called respectable American citizen to the primitive North American Native results in a profound anxiety about the stable notions of what it means to be “civilized” and “uncivilized.” Brown’s depiction of Edgar bears witness to a breakdown in the demarcations between human and inhuman, man and animal, colonizer and colonized, lawful and unlawful. The effacement of self and other in the rejection of Enlightenment rationalism contributes to the text’s construction of Edgar’s monstrosity, a process that arises out of a coupling of identity with the land and the ani-

<sup>8</sup> Renée Bergland reads the Natives of Brown’s novel as spectral presences that haunt the United States. “In *Edgar Huntly*,” she writes, “Native Americans are ghostly figures of the irrational” and she connects the Natives to the legal foundation of the country: “rational and brutal, cruel and kind, perverse and natural, savage and civilized, red and white – *Edgar Huntly* encompasses the dire ambivalence of the American constitution” (53, 56).

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mal within.

Past abuses generate a form of collective terror through a figure that haunts the other side of “civilization.” This version of the Gothic affirms that when we usurp the power of an individual or nature’s role, especially through corruption and deceit; what we create will turn on us, punishing us for our deceptions. The return of the repressed – the emergence of that which has been precluded from consciousness – is central to Brown’s Gothic narrative. Knowledge is hidden away, but it develops a cumulative energy that demands its release and forces itself into the realm of vulnerability where it must be acknowledged. Part of this force, this energy, is provided by Queen Mab, whose haunting presence signals the approach and reappearance of that which has been repressed: she is behind the Indian uprising, “boldly defy[ing] her oppressors” (886). She creates an aura of menace and uncanniness as she threatens to make something apparent that other characters feel ought to remain hidden.

But just as the violence of a transgression is the double of the enforcement of the law, Queen Mab’s rebellious plot mimics Edgar’s murderous rampage: the violence of Edgar’s law enforcement replicates the very violence he claims to regulate. This doubling process is clearly linked to questions of identity. The depiction of bloodlust in the Natives and Edgar breaks down any separation of “civilization” from “savagery,” and the actions of both result in dismembered bodies and bloody corpses. For instance, the text’s plot explores violence, death and mistaken identities when Edgar is taken for a Native and attacked by armed Euro-Americans. This scene is significant in so far as markers of difference cannot be read upon the body: the victim’s “darkness,” “whiteness” and social status are not transparent. The signs are indecipherable and the failure of distinction between categories of identity – Native and European, dark and light, self and other – result in a fear of erasure, inspiring anxieties about how these categories might merely have the value of unstable signs that lack unity and can be broken down.

Who transgresses this law? Is it Queen Mab (or other Natives) who are forced to resist the letter of the (foreign) law? Or is it the Euro-American “laws” that deny Natives access to the centre of power? Perhaps a higher law would judge the new Republic to be unlawful. Perhaps systematically perpetuating and legitimating the existence of socially marginalized groups and isolating segments of the population from the centre of culture is the real crime.

*Edgar Huntly* exposes how the legal architects of the new Republic have been frustrated in their attempts to

establish a sense of home on foreign land. This is because the knitting together of the nation’s fabric through legal processes creates a common blanket to cover its people, but the diverse pieces of cloth that have been forced together also highlight the cost at which the stitching has been accomplished. Unity in this context is an elaborate artifice, a social imaginary that joins people, place, and time. A national narrative might be articulated by some and imposed upon others. As a model of personal and communal life, the nation can terrify as well as nurture. Indeed, the legal underside of the nation can weaken social cohesion by illuminating injustice, fragmentation and discrimination. Equality is a fictive product of the national imaginary.

But just as Edgar Huntly exposes a monstrous side to the nation, the text also shows how U.S. laws try to construe its others as threatening, to imbue those who challenge the imagined stability of the nation with Gothic discourses. At the heart of the construction of the Other is a fear that the forces of disorder will be unleashed. Legal discourses of monstrosity have thus contributed to the policing of the nation, particularly when official rhetoric identifies the Other and removes him to the margins. The power of the dominant culture reasserts itself through the processes of standardization and control as power defines difference before relegating it to a position of inferiority. Within this process, disparity can be socially constructed as “abnormal” or “unnatural” and lines are drawn to separate the “natural” from the “grotesque.” Power is always about the ability to include and exclude, to determine who inhabits the centre and who is forced to live on the periphery.

By setting the novel in 1787, Brown highlights the doubling process of the law and its relationship to the nation. On the one hand, the depiction of the history of colonization in the nation is a threatening, a powerful force that has mangled, mutilated and marginalized those who have stood in its path. On the other hand, though, the text exposes how the nation has sought to construct and represent certain minority groups as threatening Others, a powerful cultural construction which sanctions the country’s definitions about who belongs and who does not belong to the social, cultural and national order. In the end, *Edgar Huntly* betrays the fascination with murderous scenes whereby the law is transgressed. And throughout the narrative, the transgressed law ultimately returns to re-establish its power in the dissolution of the other’s subjectivity through the punishments of exile, guilt and haunting. Clithero is committed to the confinement of the asylum, while Edgar is left to roam the haunted spaces of his mind in idle pursuit of Waldergrave’s murderer. Here, power

operates on the subject by way of asserting laws that result in repression that carefully harbors a secret of the past. But the purveyors of the law – whether they be Edgar-the-detective or Edgar-the-judge – are the figures of order and regulation as well as the monstrous, deformed avatars of chaos and dissolution. They represent both the law and its thorough destruction; or better yet, they are the law as destruction.

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## Varney the Vampire: Genre-making and Self-making in Gothic Fiction

Jennifer Camden

Her beautifully rounded limbs quivered with the agony of her soul. The glassy, horrible eyes of the figure ran over that angelic form with a hideous satisfaction – horrible profanation. He drags her head to the bed’s edge. He forces it back by the long hair still entwined in his grasp. With a plunge, he seizes her neck in his fang-like teeth – a gush of blood and a hideous sucking noise follows. The girl has swooned and the vampire is at his hideous repast!

– James Malcom Rymer, *Varney the Vampire or, the Feast of Blood*, 35-36

This lurid description of Varney’s violent attack on Flora Bannerworth concludes the first chapter of James Malcom Rymer’s Victorian penny dreadful, *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood* (1847), but if Rymer’s readers were hoping for more of the same, the serialized novel, published in weekly installments over the course of two years, would disappoint: the remaining vampire attacks occur behind closed doors and can only be inferred from the discovery of a violated female body.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, even this initial attack is revised and repressed when, several hundred pages later, Varney “solely aver[s], that [his] lips never touched [Flora], and that beyond the fright, she suffered nothing from Varney, the vampyre” (358). Varney’s revisionist history recuperates both Flora and himself: in the first encounter, the spectacle of Flora’s partially undressed body titillates the narrator and the vampire, but Flora’s “eyes are fascinated” (35) by Varney as well. The ambiguity of the first scene, in which the narrator suggests that Flora’s “witchery” (34) is at least partly to blame for the vampire’s interest in her, is corrected in the second: Flora faints the moment the vampire enters; she has no agency at all, but her “sweet countenance” (358) inspires the vampire to chastise himself for his inappropriate desires.

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Katarina Gephardt, Sumangala Bhattacharya, Barri Gold and Abigail Mann for their feedback on earlier versions of this article. I’d also like to thank the anonymous reviewers from *Studies in Gothic Fiction* for their generous and thoughtful feedback.

This opening scene and its revision are typical of a larger preoccupation with narrative and identity in this novel: the apparent instability of the text, which offers competing accounts of Varney’s origin as a vampire, the causes of vampirism, and vampire attacks that are often dismissed as a product of its serial format, serves instead to highlight the discursive construction of vampirism in this text. Robert Mighall has argued that critics impose discourses upon vampire narratives and thus create the “erotic ‘meaning’ of vampirism” which they purport to describe, but he gives little attention to the ways in which *Varney* anticipates his reading of *Dracula* as a “novel... about interpretation”, one that calls attention to both the discursive construction of vampirism and its concomitant instability (212). By setting vampire narratives apart from other Victorian Gothics, Mighall echoes Alison Milbank, who claims that the Radcliffian tradition “bifurcate[ed]” in the Victorian Gothic so that “the trope of the liberated heroine became separated from the trope of release from the prison of the past” (145). But such an argument overlooks the ways in which *Varney* foregrounds literary tropes as a means to understand the self, incorporating both the Radcliffian Female Gothic and the Victorian Gothic by shifting focus from the subjectivity of the female victim-heroine, Flora, to that of the male anti-hero, Varney.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, the text registers Victorian anxieties surrounding masculinity and gentlemanliness.

Robin Gilmour has productively examined the importance but also the ambiguity of the term “gentleman” for the Victorian middle class during the period in which *Varney* was published, although he does not discuss *Varney* specifically. While Nina Auerbach mentions the titular character Varney’s “tantalizing mobility” (29) and “social flexibility” (33), she reads Varney’s vampirism as “embracing not a single chosen friend of his own class, but all the greedy strata of England’s hierarchy” (33). Auerbach emphasizes Varney’s victims, who do, indeed, come from all “strata” of English society; however, Varney’s multiple origin narratives also make his place in the social hierarchy difficult to ascertain: the question is not only

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whether Varney is “gentleman or fiend” (Auerbach 29), but whether he is a gentleman at all. As Sir George Crofton notes, “we know nothing of him but from his own report” (702).

Varney’s “own report” is often inconsistent, as the accounts of the assault on Flora indicate. While the opening description of the attack is from the unnamed narrator’s point of view, the second is from Varney’s, narrated to the assembled Bannerworth family – Flora, her brothers, her fiancé and his uncle – who have rescued Varney from an angry mob of villagers by allowing him to hide in Flora’s bedroom. In this context, it is hardly surprising that Varney has shaped the narrative to suit his audience, repressing the sexual overtones and violence of the encounter and recasting Flora as the conventional Victorian Angel in the House. Curt Herr has suggested that we can interpret the contradictory accounts of the attack in one of the following ways “1) Varney is lying 2) Rymer is attempting to soften his character’s threat – making him a more sympathetic villain rather than threatening demon, or, most likely – though nearly impossible to prove, 3) this chapter was written by someone other than James Malcom Rymer” (358). This third, “most likely” interpretation is in keeping with much of the scholarship on this text, which dismisses the novel’s inconsistencies as a result of multiple authors or the economic pressures imposed by the serial format.<sup>3</sup> However, the novel is consistent in its return to the ontological question of the existence of vampires and the related epistemological questions posed by competing narratives. In other words, do vampires exist? If they do, how would we know? How would a vampire know itself? As the novel progresses, Varney shifts from a “reader” to an “author”: initially, he understands himself through the narratives imposed on him by others, which have their origin in yet other narratives, namely, travel books, legends, and eyewitness accounts. Thus while some of the text’s inconsistencies may be a result of its serialized format, the text is perhaps surprisingly consistent in its return to the trope of reading and authoring as a means to make sense of others and of oneself. The recursive nature of the novel, its insistent retelling of stories, draws attention to the discursive indeterminacy of the vampire in this text:<sup>4</sup> unlike other nineteenth-century vampire narratives, in which the vampire is a relatively stable other against which the narrative of female subjectivity or autonomy, or the autonomy of England is pitted, vampirism in this novel is unstable: vam-

pires are sometimes strangers, but they are also sometimes neighbors and daughters. In this sense, Varney both returns to the representation of vampires in folklore and anticipates the twentieth and twenty-first century vampire narratives, in which the vampire is not an externalized other, but always already one of us.<sup>5</sup>

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has described the role of Gothic conventions in relationship to self-discovery as follows:

[when] an individual fictional self is the subject of one of these conventions, that self is spatialized in the following way. It is the position of the self to be massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access. . . . The self and whatever it is that is outside have a proper, natural, necessary connection to each other, but one that the self is suddenly incapable of making. . . . And the lengths there are to go to reintegrate the sundered elements -- finally, the impossibility of restoring them to their original oneness -- are the most characteristic energies of the Gothic novel. . . . The barrier between the self and what should

3 See Lindsey Dearinger, “Playing Vampire Games: Rules and Play in Varney the Vampire and Dracula,” pgs 11-12, for a sustained discussion of this critical tradition. In contrast, Nina Auerbach suggests that “His hunger for money...softens his bond with the Bannerworths from infection to friendship” (30). While Auerbach notes that Varney “revokes his monstrous entrance” (30), she reads this revision as indicative of the novel’s “fear...of kinship” (29), suggesting that “Varney the gentleman [is] more frightening than the fanged monster who crawled through Flora’s window” (30).

4 In *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares*, Robert Mighall argues that “discourses (principally psychiatry and sexology) were responsible for producing what the majority of critics would accept – the erotic ‘meaning’ of vampirism. However, these meanings differ from, but also offer parallels to, our own interpretative procedures which serve our own desires and agendas. Having established this ‘discursive history’, I will argue that the novel is in itself about interpretation, that the narrative functions in similar ways to the psychiatric and sexological discourses which contributed to the erotic identity of the vampire” (212). Mighall focuses almost entirely on *Dracula*, but briefly mentions the conclusion of Rymer’s serial novel as a sort of historical or cultural marker: the fictional character Varney dies, and the historical figure Bertrand’s “vampirism” begins, “and would arguably prove more influential for subsequent interpretations of vampirism than Rymer’s creation” (212). While I commend Mighall’s emphasis on discursivity, I suggest the novel is preoccupied with the discursive construction of identity.

2 Flora’s plight is the subject of the first one hundred chapters of this novel; however, after Varney’s departure from Bannerworth Hall, the narrative shifts focus to Varney and his exploits.

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belong to it can be caused by anything and nothing; but only violence or magic, and both of a singularly threatening kind, can ever succeed in joining them again. (*Conventions*, 12-13)

In *Varney*, the titular character's relationship to his own past is obstructed by the multiple ways in which others seek to describe him and the competing autobiographies Varney provides at different points in the narrative. While Varney deploys signifiers of gentlemanliness<sup>7</sup>— purchasing a country estate, wearing the clothes of a gentleman, assuming the title Sir Francis Varney — to gain access to Bannerworth Hall and to the Grange, his conflicting origin narratives reveal the instability of these signifiers and also signal the ways in which Varney's immortality provides an obstacle to narrative closure. Varney's suicide at the conclusion of the novel gives him discursive stability: it allows for the definitive narrative of Varney's life to be written, both by concluding the narrative arc of the serialized penny dreadful and, within the text itself, through the newspaper clipping that Mr Bevan reads which contains the account of Varney's suicide at Mt Vesuvius.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Varney's earlier life narratives, authored by Varney at the request of humans who befriended him, the newspaper clipping provides a corrective to the ways in which the text has humanized the vampire and contains him through a mock-objectivity, a return to the Enlightenment collective point of view, represented by the multiple narrative removes enacted in the text: Varney's final words are transmitted by the guide who accompanied him to Mt Vesuvius, reported in one newspaper, extracted into another, translated into English, and mailed to Mr Bevan's door.

#### **“IN ALL HER READING”: READING GOTHIC CONVENTIONS.**

If Varney's suicide and the report of his death in the newspaper clipping provide narrative closure and discursive stability, attention to the discursive construction of vampirism

5 I am obviously indebted here to the title of Nina Auerbach's seminal book, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, but while Auerbach's book concludes by claiming that “at the end of the twentieth century, vampirism is wearing down and vampires need a long restorative sleep” (192), I suggest that the sympathetic vampire of twenty-first century fiction is anticipated by Varney.

6 Varney draws here on Polidori's Lord Ruthven, who poses as a mysterious aristocrat to gain access to society and to his victims.

throughout the novel offers a metacritical reading of the role of literary conventions in the construction of identity: Varney is constantly subject to the Gothic narratives imposed on him by other characters who seek to understand his unusual appearance and behavior through their own reading. After Varney's first attack, Marchdale, Henry, George and the village all separately come to the conclusion that Flora has been visited by a vampire. Henry explains that this supposition is based on their reading; he tells Marchdale that he is sure Flora has never heard of vampires: “I never heard her mention that in all her reading she had gathered even a hint of such a fearful superstition” (45), but, in fact, Flora has read about vampires in “the book of travels in Norway, which Mr Marchdale lent us all” (46) and, through her reading, reaches the same conclusion as the others.<sup>8</sup>

The lower class characters also rely on vampire narratives, in the form of folklore and gossip, to determine that a vampire has attacked Flora. Henry is shocked to discover that the rumor of a vampire in the neighborhood is already rampant in the village by the next day, and Dr Chillingworth's wife lends credence to the story by relying on popular tales:

Although not popular in England, still there had been tales told of such midnight visitants, so that Mrs Chillingworth, when she had imparted the information which she had obtained, had already some rough material to work upon in the minds of her auditors, and therefore there was no great difficulty in very soon establishing the fact....Under such circumstances, ignorant people always do what they have heard was done by someone else before them. (195)

The tales of the exhumation of one supposed vampire and the

7 Here I disagree slightly with Sara Hackenberg's claim that the conclusion “provides a potential to-be-continued” (74); while I find her reading of the choice of Vesuvius compelling, the yoking of Varney's suicide with the conclusion of the penny dreadful brings both his life and the narrative to a close.

8 It's worth noting that Marchdale is the first to suggest a vampire and is also the source of at least Flora's knowledge of vampires, if not that of Henry and George as well — the book was lent to “us all” — given Marchdale's scheme with Varney to remove the Bannerworth's from the house. However, Marchdale cannot be responsible for the rumors in the village as well; numerous characters make sense of Varney's behavior through their independent reading and superstitions.

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murder-by-stake of another draw on well-established vampire lore but are depicted by the narrator as brutal and senseless: the dangers of mapping vampire lore onto reality are manifest.<sup>9</sup> The novel thus lays the groundwork for a sympathetic reading of Varney as a figure attempting to make sense of his own extraordinary story while buffeted by the stories imposed on him by both upper and lower-class readers.

Readers of Rymer's text also rely on their previous reading and cultural knowledge to make sense of the novel's plot.<sup>10</sup> The first 100 chapters of the novel, which Herr terms the Bannerworth saga, have the hallmarks of the conventional Female Gothic plot. While the definition of the "Female Gothic," is often contested, for the purposes of this essay, the Female Gothic plot centers on the subjectivity of the heroine. On the verge of womanhood, supernaturally-tinged visits from a male villain call into question the heroine's sense of self, her faith in her betrothed, and her understanding of her family history. At the conclusion of the typical Female Gothic narrative, the supernatural events are given rational explanations, the male villain is vanquished, and the heroine is restored to her fortune and her fiancé. This plot maps nicely onto the Bannerworth saga:<sup>11</sup> Flora Bannerworth, and her betrothed, Charles Holland, are separated several times under circumstances that lead those around her to distrust him, and to encourage her to call off the marriage. Flora persists in believing in Charles while fending off Varney's physical attacks, his increasingly ingenious stratagems to acquire her estate, and regular threats of mob violence from angry villagers. In the end, readers learn that Charles was imprisoned by Varney and Marchdale (who was initially introduced as a family friend) and that their scheme was motivated by money: the desire to recover the deed to the Dearbrook estate, which had been buried with the corpse of a man murdered by the Bannerworth patriarch (since deceased) and Varney. As the Bannerworth saga concludes, the Dearbrook estate is restored to the family; Flora is assured that she will not suffer lasting harm from Varney's bite; Charles is restored to Flora, vindicated of wrongdoing, and they are finally able to marry.

In the typical Female Gothic plot, readers would

learn that Varney is not, in fact, a vampire, and the narrative would provide a rational, if far-fetched, explanation for his moonlight resurrections and fresh-from-the-grave stench. Instead, Varney is provided with multiple and sometimes competing narratives of origin that link the novel's preoccupation with genre to its preoccupation with self-knowledge. Each of Varney's explanations locates his narrative in a different subgenre of the Gothic; for readers and for Varney alike, each origin narrative predicts a different set of behaviors and thus a different conclusion. It is only once Varney shifts from viewing his story as a reader seeking to map his narrative onto pre-existing conventions to an author narrating his own story that Varney is able to determine his own future.

One of the first accounts of Varney's protracted life borrows from *Frankenstein* (1818) and posits a scientific explanation for his existence: the medical man anxious to try experiments on his corpse succeeds in revivifying him, but Varney does not understand his resurrection as a scientific achievement and tries to avoid discussing the circumstances surrounding it: "Speak not of that fearful episode. Let no words combine to place it in a tangible shape to human understanding" (162). Varney's refusal to narrate or to hear the details of his resurrection is similar to Frankenstein's refusal to narrate the process by which he created his creature. Rymer also partly echoes the frame narrative structure of *Frankenstein*: the hangman has told Varney a version of his resurrection, but as the novel continues, readers discover that the Frankenstein figure is in fact Dr Chillingworth, who paid the hangman for the body and offered to double the money if the hangman could manage not to break the neck (308). Chillingworth also refuses to narrate the specific processes by which he restores Varney to life, but he suggests that he is modeling his experiment on the work of French scientists. Thus, Chillingworth's reading of the "learned treatise" (307) provides a series of conventions through which he can understand Varney's survival; the parallels between Chillingworth's narrative and Frankenstein also provide readers with a framework in which to make sense of the novel. Varney's mysteriously prolonged life is, by Chillingworth and the hangman's account, scientific and rational.

However, Varney rejects this scientific narrative in favor of an entirely supernatural one. When the hangman notes that "it is implicitly believed that you are one of those dreadful creatures that feed upon the life-blood of others" and asks "what... has induced you to enact such a character?", Varney retorts, "Enact it! You say...Why may it not be real? ...Do not, with an affected philosophy, doubt all that may happen to

9 Here I disagree with Jarlath Killeen, who suggests that despite the narrator's critique of mob violence, the text indulges repeatedly in depictions of this violence for sales.

10 Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace have mapped the shifting valences of the term "Female Gothic" in "Female Gothic: Then and Now."

11 I follow Curt Herr in terming the first 100 or so chapters of the novel "the Bannerworth saga," as they primarily focus on Varney's relationship with the Bannerworth family.

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be in any degree repugnant to your usual experiences" (310). In lieu of the scientific experiment conducted by Chillingworth, Varney relies on the description of a "Hungarian...full of strange stories of vampyres" to explain his existence (357). In the Hungarian's list of the characteristics of a vampyre, Varney recognizes himself: "This was precisely my story, and from that moment I believed myself to be one of those horrible but charmed beings" (357). By identifying with the "story" of the vampire, Varney discovers both an explanation for past behaviors and a model for future action. Under the influence of the Hungarian's vampire narrative, he begins to terrorize Flora and other women in the neighborhood. However, his self-identification as malicious vampire is challenged by his interaction with the Bannerworths, which he describes as follows: "what there is at all human in me, strange to say, all of you whom I sought to injure, have awakened" (357). As Herr notes, this is a remarkable inversion of the vampire tradition popularized by *Dracula*, but nascent in Varney: if one anxiety surrounding vampires is the threat that they will produce more vampires, Varney suggests that Flora, instead of becoming another victim and thus another vampire, has turned the vampire back into a human.

Varney's confession to the Bannerworths begins a pattern that unifies this seemingly incongruous novel: while some of the text's incongruities can be linked to its serial format, Varney's multiple disguises and adventures are punctuated by consistent returns to the narrative arc of Varney's self-discovery. At various points through the novel, Varney is called upon to tell his own story. The narrative started at the Bannerworth's home is repeatedly deferred (and differs) as Varney retreats from his connection to humanity and vice versa. The novel seems to be on the verge of concluding (at least for Rymer's readers, who would have encountered the novel in serial form), when Varney has explained the hangman's version of his story to the Bannerworths and has taken refuge from the mob in their house. It appears as if Varney may live out his few remaining days with the family; however, Varney disappears while the Bannerworths debate whether or not he may remain with them. It's unlikely that he overheard their discussions, but it is worth noting that the Bannerworths cannot imagine Varney residing with them; as Henry says, "that would be objectionable for a variety of reasons and I could not think of it for a moment" (373). The best solution they can imagine is to ship him off to America, funded by Admiral Bell's fortune. Thus, while Varney has been humanized by his time with the Bannerworths, he cannot imagine a place for himself in their world, any more than they can imagine him

remaining with them.<sup>12</sup> Bound by the generic conventions of the Female Gothic, characters and readers alike expect Varney's departure.<sup>13</sup>

In keeping with the Female Gothic's emphasis on the explained supernatural, in which all supernatural occurrences are eventually given rational explanations, the Bannerworths have, with the exception of Admiral Bell, discarded the belief that Varney is in fact a vampire: they now understand all of his actions as mercenary. His initial persecution of Flora was not caused by bloodlust, but by his desire to scare them away so he could retrieve the deed to the Dearbrook estate. Varney departs the Bannerworth's home unexpectedly, leaving only a brief note, "The Farewell of Varney the Vampire," which is later followed by a letter, urging the Bannerworths to forget him, which they assume is because "Varney wants to try some new scheme" (441). Indeed, as Bette Roberts and Nina Auerbach each observe, Varney's schemes are increasingly motivated by money: the vampirism of his mercenary marriage projects seems more in keeping with Henry Tilney's description of his father's "vampirism" in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* than with the brutal attack on Flora Bannerworth that opens the novel. Yet it's important to note that Varney is once again behaving as a reader: in seeking to understand his own identity, he relies on the explanations he finds in narrative, as he understands his identity first through the hangman's account of his return to life after being executed, and next by recognizing a description of himself in the Hungarian's stories about vampires. As I've argued above, the villagers and the Bannerworths also recognize him as a vampire based on their reading. While the Bannerworth saga concludes by providing a rational explanation for Varney's vampirism, albeit one that he himself rejects by leaving "the Farewell of Varney the Vampire" (emphasis added), the abrupt return of the Bannerworth name to the narrative, 200 pages and numerous Varney aliases later, marks yet another shift in how readers understand Varney and how he understands himself. Varney is present at the creation of a new vampire where another vampire in attendance asks

12 Indeed, during his time with them, he is plagued by weakness and lassitude, which he hopes anticipates his death.

13 Here I differ from Donna Heiland's reading of Varney in *Gothic and Gender: an Introduction*: like Heiland, I am interested in Varney's inability to assimilate into human communities, but whereas she suggests that Varney can only rejoin humanity by "an action that would reverse the effect of his former crimes and reconstitute the family he has destroyed" (111-2), I claim that Varney cannot reclaim humanity without claiming his mortality: death provides the narrative closure and discursive stability otherwise denied to the vampire.

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him if he knew “some people named Bannerworth”; Varney replies “I did... They are all dead” (665). As Herr notes, Varney’s response is unusually cold and unfeeling given his friendship with the Bannerworths. It is also strange timing: this casual aside occurs in the middle of the creation of the new vampire, which provides a different origin narrative for Varney and one that insists that vampires are not only real but also legion. The invocation of the Bannerworths at a time when readers are likely to have forgotten them, particularly readers of the novel’s initial publication as a serial penny dreadful, challenges readings of the novel that focus on its inconsistencies: why remind readers of the Bannerworths if the novel is not intended, as Herr, Dearing and others have suggested, to be read holistically? The return of the Bannerworth name foregrounds the genre shifts through which the novel works: the Bannerworths “are all dead” and Varney and the narrative have also moved beyond the conventions prescribed by the Female Gothic.

**“ONE OF OUR FRATERNITY LIES HERE”: VAMPIRISM AND MASCULINITY.**

In the first half of the novel, Varney is a lone intruder, an interloper in both Bannerworth Hall and the village, whose uncanny similarity to the portrait of a Bannerworth ancestor also raises the specter of kinship, which Auerbach describes as the “central, sophisticated fear”(29) of the novel. However, at this point in the narrative, Varney is presented as part of a fraternity of vampires, summoned to “assist in the exhumation of a brother” which is described as “one of the conditions of our being” by Varney and by one of the other vampires as “that work which we never leave undone and which we dare not neglect when we know that it is to do” (664). Varney is recognized by the leader of the group and his name produces a “visible sensation” among the others. In many ways, this scene fits nicely with Sedgwick’s encapsulation of the male paranoid Gothic in a pithy catch phrase “it takes one to know one” (Coherence x) by providing Varney with a male homosocial community but also registering paranoia, at least on Varney’s part, at being recognized as part of that community. Despite the implied vampire code – “the conditions of our being” – and vampire gossip, by which Varney’s “deeds are known”, Varney is reluctant to take part in the exhumation of the vampire and is the first to suggest that the others do no more than the minimum to assist the new vampire, for he “has heard that of him which shall not induce me to lift hand or voice on his behalf” (664). Since Varney initially asks “Where lies the

vampire? Who was he?”, and since the vampire is not named as Mr Brooks until a narratorial interjection several paragraphs later, it is clear that Varney’s decision is based solely on what he has heard from the other vampires: that this man has been marked as a vampire as punishment for his cruelty in life (664). While the other vampires concur with Varney’s decision, in doing so they align themselves with their unnamed but presumably divine judge, who has punished them with vampirism for similar actions. On one level, this registers the kind of homophobic response Sedgwick maps in her reading of the male paranoid Gothic, yet while Sedgwick returns to the image of the “reversible hunt”, what is striking here is the absence of any hunt at all: the vampires watch as the newly created vampire “attacks” the watchman, but the only result of this attack is that the vampire deprives the watchman of his coat and hat, then stumbles on toward London (*Between Men* 169). The encounter is not “unspeakable” (Sedgwick *Between Men* 94) – instead, “to this day the watchman’s story...is talked of by the old women” (667). While vampirism is not represented as especially threatening here, the power of vampire narratives is: if Brooks is not a “real” vampire, then the fraternity has managed to persuade him that he is by naming him one: “Vampire arise” (665).

In the first half of the novel, Varney’s prolonged life was an unwanted gift bestowed on him by the hangman and Chillingworth that rendered him subject to violence and persecution by the mob, the police and others; the narrative of the Hungarian, while confirming his supernatural status as a vampire, described only the attributes of the vampire without providing an explanation. Varney’s next origin narrative is a retelling of *Othello*, where Varney suspects and then murders his wife, only to discover her purity too late. Following this revelation, Varney dreams of a faceless figure in an “Eden,” who is only described by the “gentle fall of its feet, and the flutter of garments” (680). This feminine figure counsels suicide by drowning, and Varney seems to have forgotten the stories of the Hungarian, who noted that water will reject the body of the vampire and that the moon will restore him to life. In light of this new origin narrative, Varney understands his vampirism as a consequence of his own behavior as man. While this explanation for Varney’s vampirism punishes Varney for “destroy[ing] her who had give up home, kindred, associations, all for me”, Varney later claims that his vampirism is a punishment for accidentally killing his son while embroiled in political subterfuge (679). In this account, too, he is visited by an ethereal being who provides him with a narrative through which to understand his experiences “Murderer,

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murderer of that being sacredly presented to your care by the great Creator of all things, live henceforth a being accursed... Varney the Vampyre" (749). Although these narratives posit different specific causes for Varney's vampirism, when viewed next to the tale of Mr Brooks, they suggest that Varney now understands vampirism as punishment for the murder of the innocent. Vampirism links masculinity and autobiography, punishing those who violate masculine norms with unending life. To regain his humanity, Varney seeks to do violence to himself.

While Varney's first suicide attempt is unsuccessful, it marks a strange shift in the narrative: in the pages that follow (the Crofton saga), mortals begin behaving like vampires. Clara Crofton's betrothed, Ringwood, is reported dead and then magically restored to life. Varney confirms his vampire status by biting Clara, but instead of fearing that she will bear vampire children (as Marchdale threatened for Flora and Charles Holland), Clara's relatives seem to want to become vampires. Varney finds himself in the strange position of preventing humans from becoming his brethren.

#### VAMPRISM AND MALE HOMOSOCIAL BONDS.

If the Bannerworth saga follows the hallmarks of the Female Gothic, the Crofton saga marks the shift to the Victorian Gothic. The doubling, the "reversible hunt" Sedgwick describes in *Between Men* is certainly in evidence here, as Clara becomes the conduit through which the homosocial bonds between Varney and the men of the Crofton family are cemented. Initially, the two daughters, "young and fair" in the Crofton house provide a way for Varney to take his revenge on the Crofton brothers for their part in foiling his suicide attempt, but Varney also finds Clara's miniature on the unconscious body of her fiancé, Ringwood, whose life he spares (691). Perhaps this coincidence explains Varney's choice to attack Clara instead of her younger sister, Emma, as Clara links Varney to Ringwood, her brothers, and her father, Sir George.

After witnessing Clara's resurrection as a vampire, Ringwood follows her and cries, "Clara; I swear that what you

are, that will I be. Take me over to the tomb with you, say but that it is your dwelling-place and I will make it mine, and declare it a very palace of the affections" (723). Clara evades him, and Varney's body is substituted for hers: misled by a "faint sound in the church behind him", Ringwood turns back and rushes into Varney's arms instead: "He saw something – it was black instead of white – a tall figure – it advanced towards him, and with great force, before he was aware that an attack was at all intended, it felled him to the ground" (724). In turn, Clara preys on a beautiful, young village girl.<sup>15</sup>

Having learned of Ringwood's exploits, Sir George and his sons decide to visit the family tomb in which Clara is interred: their visit ends with Edwin insensible and Sir George shouting "I am a vampyre and this is my tomb", then attacking the townspeople, leaving three "lifeless" (735). Pursued by his sons and Bevan, Sir George's "vampirism" unwittingly enables Clara's second death, her execution at the hands of an angry mob of villagers, who take advantage of the absence of Sir George and Mr Bevan to enter the church and stake Clara. The narrator's response to her death is surprising: "There lay the dead, alone, in that awful grave, dabbled in blood, and the victim of the horrible experiment that had been instituted to lay a vampire. The rain still fell heavily. Oh surely pitying Heaven sent those drops to wash out the remembrance of such a deed" (737-8). The narrator posits a divine judgment against the angry mob that staked Clara, while appearing to exculpate the vampire responsible for her condition in the first place.<sup>16</sup> Varney comes to bury her and proclaims "You shall now rest in peace" (738). While Jarlath Killeen has suggested that the narrative's repeated presentation of violence undermines the narrator's apparent condemnation of such violence, the alignment of the narrator's point of view with Varney's is even more striking: unlike earlier and subsequent Gothic villains (e.g. Montoni or Dracula), the narrator encourages identification with the villain's point of view and rejects the perspectives of both the upper and lower classes.

Clara's death seems to have little to do with Clara at all: when the mob decides she is a vampire and debates what

14 Barbara Gates has astutely linked Varney's suicide to Matthew Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna," noting, "If immortality means a continuation of mental or metaphysical suffering, suicide can be preferable. This subversive message is again made safe for Victorians because it occurs in tales whose characters seem far removed from nineteenth-century England" (102). For Gates, Varney's supernatural nature provides this distance from contemporary Victorian England; however, Varney's quest for self-knowledge, as Gates suggests, also renders him "akin to many" (103).

15 While Clara is often cited as a precursor of Stoker's Lucy Westenra, it's worth noting that Clara rejects a male victim and preys on a young woman, whereas Lucy and the other female vampires in Stoker's text attempt to prey on men but are only successful in feeding on children. Clara might seem to anticipate LeFanu's Carmilla, although Rymer's novel registers discomfort with the erotic possibilities of Clara's feeding: her attack happens behind closed doors and can only be inferred by the mother, who hears "a strange sucking sound, as if an animal was drinking with labour and difficulty" (725). Clara also appears to be incapable of speech once turned into a vampire.

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to do about it, it becomes clear that she is merely a means by which they can revenge themselves on Sir George and Mr Bevan. As the blacksmith notes “What’s Sir George Crofton and his family to us? To be sure he’s the landlord of some of us, and a very good landlord he is too, as long as we pay our rent...But there’s no saying how long he might be so if we didn’t”, while the butcher “had no objection in life to the affair, especially as he was at variance with the parson concerning the tithes of a little farm he kept” (729). The attack on Clara is not especially about making the neighborhood safe from a female vampire, but rather from the vampirism of the aristocracy and the church, which subsist on rent and tithes instead of blood.

Similarly, Clara provides a reason for Sir George to continue his pursuit of Varney: after inviting Varney to their home as a “curiosity”, Sir George is the first to suspect him of murdering Clara and to pursue him (690). His obsession with vengeance is particularly striking as Varney’s bite does not in fact kill Clara; instead, “the shock to the nervous system...induced some sudden action of the heart that has been too much for vitality” (701). After Clara’s second and final death, Sir George plans to leave the country, imagining that Varney will “pursue [Emma], and with frightful vindictiveness drive her to the grave”, but that pursuit is, in Sedgwick’s terminology, reversed, when Sir George learns that Varney is in Mr Bevan’s house (743). While Sir George forces open doors and Bevan anticipates “some very dreadful scene would ensue, as a consequence of the unbridled passion of Sir George Crofton”, this pursuit does not end with the erotically charged male embrace Sedgwick charts in her reading of Victorian Gothic fiction in *Between Men* (744). Instead, Varney’s body is once again replaced by text, a packet of papers that contain his biography. Varney urges Bevan to accept the packet in place of his person: “to attempt to follow me would be futile” and Bevan concurs “all pursuit would be utterly useless...as he could not think what course immediately to pursue that would do good to Varney or anybody else, he thought he had better turn his attention at once to the documents that the vampire had left to his perusal” (745-6). Mr Bevan is notably the only character who can imagine Varney as part of a divinely ordered universe: “If it seems fit to the great ruler of Heaven and of earth that there should be ever such horrible creatures as vampyres,

ought I his creature to question it?” (738). Bevan thus posits that Varney’s supernatural condition is necessarily part of the natural world because it must have been ordained by the Creator.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Varney refuses to believe in God as creator, or author, of his existence. Instead Varney re-reads his own narrative and realizes: “when I have sought to rid the world of my own bad company, I have been moved to do so by some act of kindness and consideration, most contrary to my deserts; and then again when I have been cast back by the waves of fate upon the shores of existence, my heart is burdened, and I have begun to work mischief and misery and woe to all” (741). Having noticed this repeated pattern in the story of his own life, Varney believes suicide is his only option: he seeks to author his own narrative, including its conclusion, instead of relying on a divine (or supernatural) author.

However, readers do not follow Varney: we are placed in the position of the abandoned witnesses and readers of Varney’s story. In this sense, the novel is consistent: the Bannerworths, Admiral Bell and Mr Bevan may pursue Varney’s narrative, but he always leaves unexpectedly. The novel concludes with an account from the newspaper: Varney publishes the narrative of his life and demise by asking the guide to accompany him to the edge of Vesuvius, where he states:

when you reach the city you will cause to be published an account of my proceedings and what I say. You will say that you accompanied Varney the Vampire to the crater of Mount Vesuvius, and that, tired and disgusted with a life of horror, he flung himself in to prevent the possibility of a reanimation of his remains. Before the guide could utter anything but a shriek, Varney took one tremendous leap, and disappeared into the burning mouth of the mountain. (757)

As Herr notes, this newspaper account serves to distance the reader from their experience of Varney (who, in the saga of the Bannerworths, moves from distant and scrupulously polite foe to personal friend), and anticipates Dracula’s reliance on evidence, in the form of newspaper accounts, diaries, and

16 This echoes Rymer’s earlier narration of the mob violence, but is all the more striking given Clara’s social position and prominence in the story (as opposed to the nameless victim whose death by the mob is narrated in the first half of the novel) and Varney’s role in giving her peace.

17 In this sense, Bevan’s argument is exactly antithetical to that of Dr Chillingworth, who refuses to believe that Varney could be part of a world created by God.

phonograph recordings. The newspaper clipping also marks a shift from Varney's intimate confessions to trusted friends to a revelation of his identity – Varney the Vampire – to the literate world.

Varney's struggles to come to terms with his identity chart the shift from Female to Victorian Gothic and anticipate the representations of sympathetic vampires in recent fiction. Like Varney, these vampires struggle to understand their condition and their place in a world that views them as monsters. If Varney's suicide provides at least the fantasy of narrative closure and discursive stability by reinscribing the vampire as other, the sympathetic vampire of contemporary fiction refuses this distinction: the vampire is always already one of us.

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# The Act of Witness: *Outlast* and Videoludic Body Gothic

Jonathan Newell

## INTRODUCTION

The 2013 Canadian survival horror game *Outlast* opens with a warning: “*Outlast* contains intense violence, gore, graphic sexual content, and strong language. Please enjoy.” This disclaimer calls attention not only to the game’s gruesome content but explicitly acknowledges that such horrors are enjoyable for many players. The game goes on to instruct players to “stay alive as long as you can” while further cautioning that the game should not be played like a first-person shooter: “You are not a fighter; to navigate the horrors of Mount Massive and expose the truth, your only chances are to run, hide, or die.” Followed by the downloadable content *Whistleblower* in 2014, both *Outlast* and its prequel/sequel<sup>1</sup> call on players to endure “an intimate tour of hell on earth,” in the name of uncovering the truth.

This article puts together several relatively recent scholarly claims to argue that *Outlast* creates a somatic ludic experience whose appeal to the body of the player reflects on technologies of power and the reduction of the human body to its base materiality. I draw on Xavier Aldana Rey’s formulation of what he calls body gothic as a mode that “relies on the embodied nature of the human and on our ability to experience fictional mutilation vicariously” to theorize the relation between the player and the depictions of torture and pain *Outlast* stages (*Body Gothic* 166). I also rely on Bernard Perron’s argument that survival horror games are part of an “extended body genre” that urges the body of the player “to act and feel through its presence, agency, and embodiment in the fictional world” in order to understand the aesthetic specificities

1 From here onwards, when referring to *Outlast*, it can be assumed that I am also referring to its DLC (downloadable content) *Whistleblower* unless I am describing a specific portion of either game: the two effectively form a single text.

of *Outlast* as a video game of a certain subgenre (125). *Outlast* deprives the player of weapons and requires them to run, hide, and otherwise escape violent encounters to survive and progress. At several points the protagonists are captured, restrained, and graphically tortured, forcing players to endure scenes of bodily violation to continue. By emphasizing the physical vulnerability of its protagonists and denying players the means of defending themselves, *Outlast* exhibits a fundamentally masochistic affective-corporeal aesthetics.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of demanding that its players harm other bodies, *Outlast* calls on them to feel and look, to collect information and chronicle the things they see. The game intertwines affects of horror and disgust with pity, empathy, and sympathy, and the key activity of both games is that of observing – of witnessing and enduring. *Outlast*’s masochistic model of enjoyment classifies it as one of, what Bonnie Ruberg calls, “games that hurt (by design),” that is, games “designed to tantalize and torture by proxy” and which “play with the experience of pain” (120). Ruberg suggests that games that hurt and other “no-fun games” destabilize what she terms the “monolith of fun”, whose “myopic focus ... forecloses a rich array of emotions – among them anger, annoyance, fear, alarm, and hurt – that can in fact shape a game’s message” (110). Invoking Jack Halberstam’s model of queer failure as “a mode of rejecting neoliberal values,” Ruberg notes that masochism in

2 While *Outlast*’s aesthetic strategies are distinctive, the game has important predecessors – notably Frictional Games’ eerie *Penumbra* series (2007-2008), their decidedly gothic *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (2010) and its sequel (developed by The Chinese Room) *Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs* (2013), and their post-apocalyptic science-fiction/horror title *SOMA* (2015). Creative Assembly’s *Alien: Isolation* (2014), with its emphasis on stealth, vulnerability, and body horror, might also qualify as part of a survival horror renaissance which *Outlast* exemplifies. *Condemned: Criminals Origins* (2005) and *Condemned 2: Bloodshot* (2008) perhaps foreshadow elements of this atmospheric, suspenseful approach to survival horror.

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particular can be understood “as an ecstatic rejection of mainstream power structures” (114). Questioning the notion that “games are supposed to be fun”, Ruberg refuses to “explain away” the unpleasant moments in games but rather reads them as queer interventions which “allow us to uncover unexplored modes of experience” (109,122).

Though her treatment of “no-fun” games – including annoying, boring, alarming, and sad games, ranging from the ultra-difficult “punishment game” *Super Hexagon* (2012) to the melancholy *Gone Home* (2013) – is rich, Ruberg does not consider horror games in any detail. As many literary critics have noted, horror fiction and other media present a paradox – a manifestation of the more general paradox of aversion, what Aaron Smuts calls “the paradox of painful art” (60).

As Noël Carroll puts it: “if horror necessarily has something repulsive about it, how can audiences be attracted to it?” (158). I contend that *Outlast* uses affect in precisely the disruptive way that Ruberg identifies in order to interrogate systems of power, blending horror and institutional critique. In doing so, *Outlast* also manufactures a form of cognitive fascination of the sort described by Carolyn Korsmeyer in her theorization of disgust, a form of aesthetic insight into the nature of things that converts normally aversive emotions into something resembling attractive ones, recasting “pleasure” as it is usually understood into a form of “absorption,” a “modifier of attention” (118). I use Korsmeyer’s cognitivist account in conjunction with Ruberg’s idea of no-fun and the affective-corporal aesthetics theorized by Reyes and Perron to read *Outlast* as a game of difficult pleasures and rich experience rather than one of transparently enjoyable, traditional “fun.”

### THE DOCTORS ARE SICK

Although imbricated with one another in a non-linear chronology, *Outlast* and *Whistleblower* are themselves essentially linear, with narratives divided into chapters oriented around specific areas, enemies, and objectives. As Ewan Kirkland suggests, survival horror games, while atmospheric and immersive, tend to eschew “simulational complexity” or interactivity in favour

of “narrative and representational detail” designed to inculcate a “sense of helplessness, entrapment, and pre-determination”, a narrative claustrophobia that greater degrees of freedom might undermine (64).

With this gothic generic structure in mind, I quickly summarize *Outlast* and provide an overview of its major gameplay elements and its deployment of affect as a work of body gothic, then perform close readings of several key chapters and sequences of *Outlast*, sequences where the biopolitics of body gothic and masochistic models of videoludic experience become especially salient. In claiming *Outlast* as a “no-fun” or masochistic game that draws player attention to bodily suffering, I am not suggesting that most players come to survival horror necessarily seeking social or political insights – more likely, they are seeking a series of shocks, chills, frights, frissons of disgust, and other intense affective experiences. However, it is precisely through such affects that *Outlast* conducts its institutional critique, a critique which further lends narrative stakes to the investigations of the player.

*Outlast* and *Whistleblower* overlap, forming a single, non-linear narrative. Both games concern the misdoings of the Murkoff Corporation, a fictitious international biomedical research institute posing as a charitable organization, which “has a long track record of disguising profit as charity” and which possesses links to such morally dubious historical initiatives as the human experiments carried out by the CIA’s Project MKUltra and the importation of Nazi scientists during Operation Paperclip, both real, historical programs.<sup>3</sup> The games are set in the suitably gothic Mount Massive Asylum for the Criminally Insane, an isolated facility in the mountains of Colorado.

In *Outlast*, the player assumes the role of Miles Upshur, a freelance investigative journalist hoping to expose the dirty secrets of Murkoff at Mount Massive. He is responding to a tip from the protagonist of

3 Project MKUltra (1953-1973) was the CIA’s “mind control program,” infamous for a series of covert, illegal experiments involving drugs, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, and torture. Operation Paperclip (1949-1990) was an Office of Strategic Services program for relocating scientists from Nazi Germany to the United States as part of America’s struggle for Cold War supremacy. While neither historical program is explored with any rigour in *Outlast*, their invocation does underscore the frightening reality of unethical scientific research and links the quasi-fantastic narrative of the game to real-world suffering and exploitation.

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*Whistleblower*, Waylon Park, a software engineer who alerts Miles to Murkoff's misdeeds. As Waylon writes to Miles in a secret email, which features at the start of both games:

Terrible things happening there. Don't understand it. Don't believe half the things I saw. Doctors talking about dream therapy going too deep, finding something that had been waiting for them in the mountain. People are being hurt and Murkoff is making money. It needs to be exposed.

As the protagonists Miles and Waylon, players collect evidence on Murkoff and reveal the horrors they witness. Miles quickly discovers that something has gone terribly wrong at the asylum: orderlies and security forces are dead and the patients have run amok. Many of these inmates, or "Variants" as they are called, are hideously mutated and mutilated (see fig. 1): they are what Kelly Hurley would call "abhuman," beings "not-quite-human" and "characterized by ... morphic variability, continually in danger of ... becoming other" (3-4).

While *Outlast* represents the Variants as dangerous and monstrous – a representation undoubtedly owing some of its horrific power to the othering of the mentally ill – it also invites players to sympathize and identify with the mutated inmates, especially by the game's end when Miles himself is mentally and physically deteriorating. As Miles puts it in the note "Let it Burn": "I'm not the only victim here, not by a long shot." A number of these Variants are led by a mysterious priest-like figure who styles himself "Father Martin" and worship something called the "Walrider," or "The Swarm," a ghostly figure Miles glimpses several times and which is compared to the Germanic spirit known as the "Alp," "Mara," or "Schart," succubus-figures that torment dreamers.<sup>4</sup>

For a significant portion of *Outlast*, the Walrid-

<sup>4</sup> The mara and alp are Scandinavian and German creatures, respectively, both linked to nightmares, sleep, and vampirism. Though the Walrider is emphatically *not* these entities, the folkloric allusions help to sustain a Todorovian fantastic hesitation throughout much of the game – it remains unclear to what extent the strange occurrences in the game are supernatural.

er seems as if it may be an actual supernatural entity that the researchers discovered in the heart of the mountain. Following a series of harrowing experiences in the asylum during which Miles is tortured and nearly killed, he discovers that the Walrider is in fact a swarm of nanites controlled by patients exposed to the "Morphogenic Engine," a process allowing patients on the brink of madness to control the nanites through lucid dreaming. He learns that the project is the work of Dr. Rudolf Wernicke, a Nazi scientist of extreme old age still alive in the bowels of the facility. Wernicke's office contains a massive painting of Prometheus being tortured by vultures, and he is compared explicitly to Dr. Victor Frankenstein in documents; as Reyes points out, both Frankenstein and the Nazi physician Josef Mengele are significant figures for body gothic and surgical horror (*Body Gothic* 1). Wernicke's vision is to transform "the cells of human bodies into nanofactories," but he realizes that it was hubris "to use mad men to control something so strong." Wernicke tells players that "only a test subject who had witnessed enough horror was capable of activating the engine" – in other words, only someone like Miles, who becomes the new host for the nanoswarm at the end of the game.

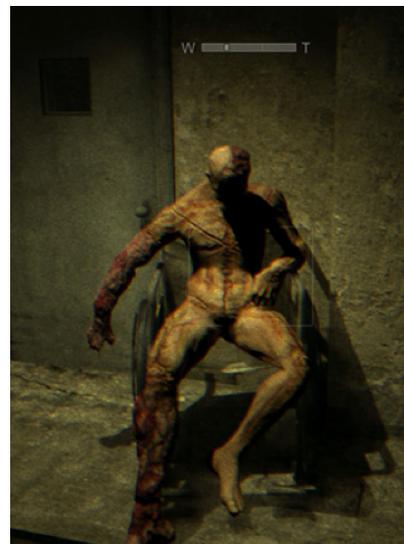


Fig. 1. The "Variants" are former inmates, their bodies warped by the unwholesome science of Murkoff into grotesque, abhuman forms (Red Barrels, 2013).

*Whistleblower* acts as both prequel and sequel to *Outlast*. Waylon, whose email to Miles is quickly discovered by his Murkoff superiors, is forcibly pro-

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cessed as a patient and exposed to the Morphogenic Engine but manages to escape during the chaos as the Walrider, emancipated from its controls, initiates the breakout whose aftermath Miles will later discover. The game follows Waylon as he attempts to send for help and then to escape the asylum. He is eventually captured by a sadistic patient, Eddie Gluskin, and sedated for a lengthy period of time. After he wakes and escapes captivity, the events of *Outlast* have concluded, and the Walrider – now with Miles as its host – combs the halls of Mount Massive, killing the private security contractors dispatched by Murkoff to clean up the mess. After leaving the asylum with the assistance of the Walrider/Miles, Waylon chooses to release what he knows to the outside world, despite the likelihood of dire personal consequences.

**LITTLE PIGS**

The gameplay elements of *Outlast* directly contribute to its somatic appeal to the player's body via affect. Perron notes that survival horror, as an extended body genre, typically engenders a strong sense of unity between player and protagonist: survival horror players become “attuned with the game” in a state of “psychological flow” facilitated by the “vicarious kinesthesia of a video game [stemming] from the connection between the gamer and his player character” (139). Because games engage more sensory systems than film – including haptic and tactile systems – they invite “the body to immerse itself in a new sensitivity” (Perron 136-7). *Outlast* exemplifies this aspect of the survival horror genre, keeping the player rigidly in the position of the player characters in a first person perspective and eschewing cut-scenes save when the protagonist is restrained (crucially even these, as I explore below, remain in first person).

Most gameplay sequences in *Outlast* revolve around a few core activities: exploring Mount Massive asylum, gathering clues, documents, or other items such as key cards and batteries needed to progress, hiding from enemies, running away, and recording footage using a camcorder (which also doubles as a night-vision device). The camcorder forms an unusual frame through which much of the game is perceived, giving *Outlast* something of the feeling of a found footage horror film à la *The Blair Witch Project* (1999),

*Paranormal Activity* (2007), and the like – although, unlike these films, we see the film being produced rather than relying on an unseen editor to compile it for us. The camcorder not only serves as a symbolic representation of *Outlast*'s preoccupation with the visual and with acts of witnessing, recording, and evidence-gathering, it plays a key role in the game's affective-corporeal aesthetics as well.

Reyes has recently suggested that cameras in found footage films work “to strengthen the artificial alignment between vision/body of the film and vision/body of the viewer via the camera holder,” in such a way that “the point is to actually bypass the intermediary subject altogether so that camera viewpoint and viewer become almost synergetic” (“Reel Evil” 130). Thus, in found footage film, the viewer may “step more seamlessly” into the position of the character holding the camera (Reyes, “Reel Evil” 130).

Neil McRobert similarly argues that found footage films exploit a kind of “ontological and epistemological confusion”, achieving a “blurring of realities” by relying “on the amateur camcorder as a framing device,” one which helps to smudge the line between fiction and reality by implying “that the images caught on camera have taken place in the audience's reality” (137,139). Unlike the found manuscript – a common trope in Gothic literature, from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and many other texts – found footage cinema refuses the “counterfeit past” and instead insists on collapsing the “distance between the viewer and the images on display” (McRobert 141).

*Outlast*'s use of a framing device like a camera is not without precedent in survival horror games. Michael Nitsche, writing of a camera in *Fatal Frame* (2001) and its sequels, argues that the camera “locates and simultaneously blurs the threshold from the virtual to the real” (206). The camcorder does much the same in *Outlast* as in *Fatal Frame* and found footage films. Even as it filters or mediates events through its lens, it brings the player closer to Miles and Waylon, drawing the player's attention to the act of witnessing as we see through the eyes of the protagonist. Just as the camera in *Fatal Frame* alerts the player to the presence of spirits, so does the camcorder in *Outlast* alert

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players to Variants hiding in darkness – as well as the sinister Walrider, only fully visible using the camcorder’s night vision mode. In *Outlast*, then, the camcorder furthers the extended embodiment of the player and psychological flow typical of survival horror while also bolstering a sense of verisimilitude or realism, fusing player and character in order to collapse the distance between bodies and elide the virtual and the real.

Apart from recording, frenetic, obstacle-cluttered chases punctuated with frenzied musical cues and suspenseful moments hiding beneath beds or in lockers constitute the greater part of the gameplay experience in *Outlast* – activities that underscore the protagonists’ powerlessness and vulnerability. These demanding sequences involve dense concatenations of what Andreas Gregersen and Torben Grodal call “P-actions” or primitive actions, bodily actions on the part of the player that map to the virtual protagonist’s movements and so establish “an embodied awareness in the moment of action” wherein a “player’s intentions, perceptions, and actions” are fused (67). While such P-actions may be minimal, involving simply the manipulation of a joystick or keyboard, they eventually become intuitive, such that “the gamer has a sense of being-in-the-game-world,” heightening affect: players are frightened or disgusting because they are “in the moment of agency and ownership of actions, navigating a specular body” (Perron 139). Because “observing other agents who perform bodily actions tends to activate parts of one’s own motor system”, the intense chase sequences of *Outlast*, with their proliferations of P-actions – barricading doors, leaping to ledges or through windows, climbing ladders, squeezing through tight spaces to avoid pursuit – offer an especially powerful version of being-in-the-game-world, one that frays the nerves and makes the player keenly aware of Mile’s and Waylon’s bodies and the suffering they endure (Gregersen and Grodal 68).

Chases, as Carl Therrien observes, are a major trope of the survival horror genre (36), and, constitute one of the genre’s “three F’s,” of “freeze, flight or fight,” all actions whose interactivity encourage a sense of embodiment (Perron 138). While survival horror is often defined by “the scarcity of offensive resources”, *Outlast* is among those few survival horror games that

eschew fighting virtually altogether, leaving stealth and running away as the only means of eluding enemies (Therrien 37).

*Outlast* also involves what Marc Santos and Sarah White would call “hermeneutic pleasure,” a pleasure “based on our need to perceive things in terms of ‘ordered’ narration” (70). Such hermeneutic pleasure “involves constructing a consistent linear narrative from the potential chaos of the game”, which “[serves] to fix the protagonist and the player in a story over which they have no control” (Kirkland 68). The player must sift through an array of notes, documents, memoranda, and other text, as well as the protagonist’s own scribbled observations: in Mile’s case, journalistic asides scribbled down in his notebook; in Waylon’s, a letter to his wife, hastily penned lest he never see her again. In *Outlast* the compilation of documents forms part of the player’s gradual comprehension of the horrors of Mount Massive, an investigation into the asylum’s dark history and unethical scientific practices. Hermeneutic pleasure, then, becomes part of a quest for the horrifying truth, a quest to expose the misdeeds carried out by those with power at the expense of those without it.

By pairing a visceral, somatic mode of play with a hermeneutic one, *Outlast* entangles textual interpretation with the body in pain. Its setting, the asylum, lays further groundwork for the game’s interest in institutions of power. As Foucault famously observes in *Madness and Civilization* (1965), the rise of science during the Enlightenment coincided with the creation of “enormous houses of confinement”, houses enmeshed in a social construction of madness and inextricably linked to economic crises and mechanisms of reward and punishment, mechanisms designed to condition and regulate labour (38). In contrast to Renaissance conceptions of madness that associated it with “imaginary transcendences” and wisdom, from the seventeenth-century onwards, madness was understood as a kind of “social uselessness” (58). Filled with shadows, mutilated bodies, clanking bars, and the moans of the condemned, Mount Massive not only functions as a suitably grotesque gothic setting for a survival horror game, it foregrounds the biopolitical structures that comprise the true horror of *Outlast* and

its status as a work of body gothic.

### CONCRETE FAITH

Perhaps the most horrific scene in *Outlast*, exemplifying its body gothic sensibilities, occurs in the filthy bathroom-cum-operating-theatre of “Doctor” Richard Trager, a former executive of the asylum with delusions of medical expertise. Trager operates a kind of personal fiefdom in the male ward of the asylum, a bloody domain in which he keeps various “patients” – his victims – sedated or restrained in hospital beds, many obviously dismembered and surgically modified. Though he at first appears as a saviour, deceiving Miles by offering him an escape route after the player gets cornered by a horde of slaving Variants, Trager soon reveals his true colours, knocking Miles out and strapping him into a wheelchair before subjecting him to a rambling lecture on economics and murder, then brutally amputating two of his fingers with a pair of bone shears, a process that he records using Miles’s camcorder (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Dr. Trager removes Mile’s fingers (Red Barrels, 2013).

Trager’s torture of Miles constitutes one of the most viscerally affective sequences in the game

and exemplifies *Outlast*’s fixation on corporeality and bodily suffering. Players are forced to witness Trager’s mock-medical procedure during a cut-scene – which is seamless with the player-controlled sections, and, of course, remains in first person – in which they are thrust into a keenly masochistic mode of spectatorial identification. Scenes like this one are central to *Outlast*’s subversion of conventional generic and videoludic expectations and inform my classification of the game as one that hurts by design, in Ruberg’s terms. While Trager’s capture of the player might at first seem to threaten a form of what Clint Hocking terms “ludonarrative dissonance” – what Paul Ralph and Kafui Monu describe as “a cognitive discomfort caused by misalignment between game mechanics and story” (96) – I argue that this potential dissonance is averted, or at least lessened, by the careful mirroring of player and protagonist. Mile’s capture takes both player and protagonist by surprise, and during the cut-scene Mile’s powerlessness and the player’s powerlessness reflect one another since Miles is subdued and strapped down: that is to say, while the player abruptly cannot control Miles’ body, *Miles* cannot fully control his body either.

Trager’s mutilation and his accompanying rant concerning fiat money, faith, zero-sum economics, and the commodification of flesh epitomizes *Outlast*’s thematic concerns with biopower, the materialist reduction of bodies, and the capitalist exploitation of marginalized subjects. As Trager gleefully puts it, his grotesque experiment is an attempt to “turn the consumer into the means of production,” to create a “new product,” one that will “sell itself.” While Trager’s activities are no longer part of the company strategy of Murkoff but rather seem to be a form of autotelic, sadistic play masked by marketing jargon, his cruelty and obvious enjoyment of the suffering he produces reflect the pathological (il)logic of late capitalism and neoliberalism, extracting every ounce of profit from labour.

The sequence is further politicized insofar as it transforms Miles from an essentially passive observer into a product, a part of Mount Massive and its madness. Up to this point Miles has been unmarked by his time in the asylum; after Trager’s surgery he is physically maimed and mentally traumatized, his

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notes and observations growing increasingly frantic and dissociated from reality. Consequently both Miles and the player transition from the role of outsider to that of inmate and victim. While, ultimately, the player remains at arm's length from the suffering protagonist, separated by the screen, the sense of extended embodiment the survival horror genre works to create mitigates this potential alienation from the body in pain, narrowing (if never fully closing) the gap between player and character.

Throughout the end of the "Male Ward" chapter in which Trager appears he is consistently depicted at the top of Mount Massive's hierarchy and is closely associated with the abuses of power carried out by the sinister Murkoff Corporation. In the note "Dr. Rick Trager," Miles observes that Trager "talks like a white collar business school douchebag, probably has a set of golf clubs in the trunk of his Audi" and claims that he'd "bet the rest of [his] fingers he was Murkoff brass," an assessment verified by one of Trager's victims who claims that Trager was an executive "filled with Wer-nicke's nightmares." Trager peppers his speech with corporate references, describing his meeting with Miles as a "two martini lunch" and promising to teach him "the seven habits of highly eviscerated people." He frequently extolls the virtues of a strong work ethic and chides Miles for being "a quitter" once he escapes. These corporate associations, coupled with Trager's pretensions of medical knowledge, establish him as an authority figure and thus frame his violent acts as microcosmic reflections of Murkoff's grander excesses: his experiments possess the same demented logic as the Morphogenic project.

Miles, strapped to a wheelchair and addressed as a patient awaiting a consultation, completes the microcosm by standing in for Mount Massive's patients, collapsing the gulf of alterity that separates him from the mutated inmates of the asylum. As Reyes argues, surgical horror revolves around the loss of "the right to an autonomous existence guarded by the laws protecting citizens" and "projects anxieties regarding the limitations of the flesh, focusing ... on the body as a claustrophobic prison" (*Body Gothic* 152,165). Trager's pre-surgical speech strips away any spiritual or transcendental dimension to Miles' experience. "God died

with the gold standard," Trager insists, insisting that Miles must accept a "more concrete faith" now that "all the money is gone." This rhetoric – and Miles' imprisonment – reduce him to a material body, a body that Trager exploits (purportedly) in the name of scientific knowledge and profit.

We see further evidence of Trager's rapacious capitalist attitude in documents discoverable through exploration of the asylum. In one particularly chilling document, "Persecutorial Delusions," Trager orders that an employee who protests against the company's abusive policies be processed as a patient "to treat his persecutorial delusions ... until the time of his death." In another document, "Project Walrider Cost Report," found behind a blood-sodden curtain in one of his operating rooms, Trager proudly boasts of slimming back personnel "by more than eighty people" in order to "cut the fat from this PROJECT WALRIDER disaster." What sound like merciless layoffs are revealed as euphemisms for murder in the subsequent lines, where Trager discloses that he's "been figuring out a lot about biology," and that he can "now say with absolute certainty that a person can't live without his kidneys."

This juxtaposition of nihilistic greed and aimless, unethical science further situates Trager in synecdochal relation to Murkoff and the amoral economic forces they represent. These framing measures construct Trager's torture of Miles as something more than a staging of spectacular and gratuitous violence. The surgical horror he enacts accrues sociopolitical significance – a significance further amplified by the complex apparatus of embodiment and masochistic spectatorship *Outlast* deploys.

#### LET ME SELL YOU THE DREAM

Miles' mutilation at the hands of Dr. Trager subverts many assumptions associated with action games, including many horror games, which typically eschew permanent bodily damage in favour of health bars or other abstract indications of physical well-being. Despite their efforts to cultivate atmosphere and a sense of immersion, many survival horror games, including paradigmatic examples of the subgenre such as *Dead Space* (2008), *Silent Hill* (1999), and *Resident Evil* (1996) still feature relatively abstract health systems, typically employing health-refilling items as part of a

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resource-management challenge. As Matthew Weise notes of *Resident Evil*, such conventional mechanics alter the stakes of engaging with monsters or other enemies, decreasing their lethality and empowering players; comparing the game to the zombie films from which it draws inspiration, he suggests that “the player can afford to make mistakes in ways zombie film protagonists cannot” since “the player can have their flesh chomped within an inch of their life and still fully recover” (254). *Outlast*’s first person perspective and its representation of Miles’ pain – screams and a blurring, vertiginously thrashing screen glimmering with flashes of red – compound the survival horror genre’s sensory address and its conflation of the player and the protagonist’s body, but in such a way that subverts most videoludic convention, where damage is typically impermanent, avoidable, and non-specific.

Mile’s suffering is further emphasized when, after freeing himself, he vomits copiously, the screen dizzily lurching; the player, out of control at this moment, is likely sharing in some portion of Miles’ nausea as a result of the thoroughly revolting scene. While players cannot literally share in Miles’ pain or revulsion, the powerful corporeal-affective embodiment and identification *Outlast* encourages offers a potent fusion of player and protagonist, one potentially more intimate than that offered by cinema or literature, where the gulf between work and viewer or reader is more difficult to bridge. Furthermore, the game’s specific use of *disgust* is relevant to this strategy of extended embodiment and helps to lessen the alienation players might feel when faced with a body in pain. As aestheticians have long noted, disgust seems to somehow transcend its own representation: the image of something disgusting *is itself disgusting*. This observation famously leads Immanuel Kant to reject any possibility of disgust’s aestheticization since, for Kant, it is the “one kind of ugliness that cannot be presented in conformity with nature without obliterating all aesthetic liking and hence artistic beauty” since a disgusting object “is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself” (180).

Other philosophers of art, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have essentially agreed with Kant’s conclusion. While Korsmeyer ar-

gues against Kant in claiming that disgust can generate powerful aesthetic experiences, she agrees with him that disgust possesses a certain “sensuous immediacy” such that “imitation in art fails to cushion or distance the emotion to any appreciable degree” (49). Indeed, she contends that this feature of disgust ends up becoming “an aesthetic virtue” since it “actually averts one of the standard philosophical problems regarding the nature of emotions aroused in aesthetic contexts” – namely, the paradox of fiction or how it is that art can arouse emotions at all (Korsmeyer 53). Disgust’s unique aesthetic nature makes it especially useful in creating the sense of extended embodiment that survival horror generates: since disgust is “transparent” it becomes a shared affect between player and character, the two mirroring one another’s emotional states.

Though the torturous surgery takes place in a cut-scene, it follows swiftly on the heels of an elaborate chase sequence that taxes the player’s ability to navigate corridors, slam and block doors, and otherwise deter pursuit, activities which demand the player become especially aware of Mile’s position and presence in virtual space while actively keeping him from harm, further blurring the distinction between player and character and encouraging a sense of extended embodiment.

By following the chase with the surgery and so denying players the chance to escape, forcing them to endure the (unskippable) torture cut-scene in order to continue, *Outlast* places them in an unusually vulnerable position while permanently maiming its protagonist: for the rest of the game, players will see the bloody, bony stumps of Mile’s severed fingers every time they open a door or raise Mile’s camcorder (see fig. 3). Players, of course, are likely to be especially conscious of their fingers given their constant use during play.

Trager’s violence undermines player agency only moments after the player has successfully taken a series of what Perron might call “effective protective actions”, keeping Miles alive through decisions, choices, and skill (138). The amputation thus not only generates visceral affects of shock, disgust, and disbelief, it exploits these affects and relies on the extended embodiment of the player to underscore the vulnerability and powerlessness of both player and protago-

nist, rubverting videoludic norms in order to represent the body as a claustrophobic, corporeal prison.



Fig. 3. Miles is left with bloody stumps, horrifically visible throughout the rest of the game (Red Barrels, 2013).

Richard Rouse III argues that in contrast with horror fiction and film, horror games are still ultimately about empowerment: “If too much of the player’s feeling of power is taken away, in comparison to what they’re accustomed to experiencing in other games, they’re going to feel frustrated and hence pulled out of the experience” (23). He insists that “almost all narrative video games are power fantasies of one kind or another” (Rouse 23). While Rouse is generally correct – most horror games do enshrine a certain level of empowerment as a sacrosanct precondition for ludic pleasure – *Outlast* defies convention by staging a fantasy not of power but of powerlessness. The game’s emphasis on the imprisonment, vulnerability, and victimization of Miles, especially in sequences like Trager’s horrific surgery, thus undermines player expectations in order to prioritize bodily affect, masochistic pleasure, and an intensely somatic experience of corporeality resonant with *Outlast*’s critique of technoscientific

excess and the capitalist exploitation of marginalized bodies.

Ruberg points out that “no-fun,” as she calls it, “is also a call back to our bodies, a call to feel what we aren’t supposed to want to feel, a call to resist normative thinking” (122). While Miles eventually evades Trager and even inadvertently kills him, offering a moment of cathartic satisfaction, relief, and vengeance, his powerlessness in the face of Trager’s bone shears and the lunatic corporate power they represent offers players a queasy form of narrative pleasure quite at odds with that afforded to the player of a first- or third-person shooter or typical action-horror game – a pleasure wrapped up in the experience of trauma, survival, and empathy for those consumed by the hideous biopolitical engine of neoliberal capitalism.

### HELLO, MEAT!

If Dr. Trager stands in for a corporate and biomedical authority grown corrupt and mad with its own power, then Frank Manera – one of the major antagonists of *Whistleblower* – functions as a grotesque caricature of the consumer. In this sense, Manera finds important gothic predecessors in the ravenous zombie, which since George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) has been associated with the excesses of capitalist consumerism, as well as various (living) cinematic cannibals such as those of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974): as Robin Wood notes, “cannibalism represents the ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end of human relations under capitalism” (213).

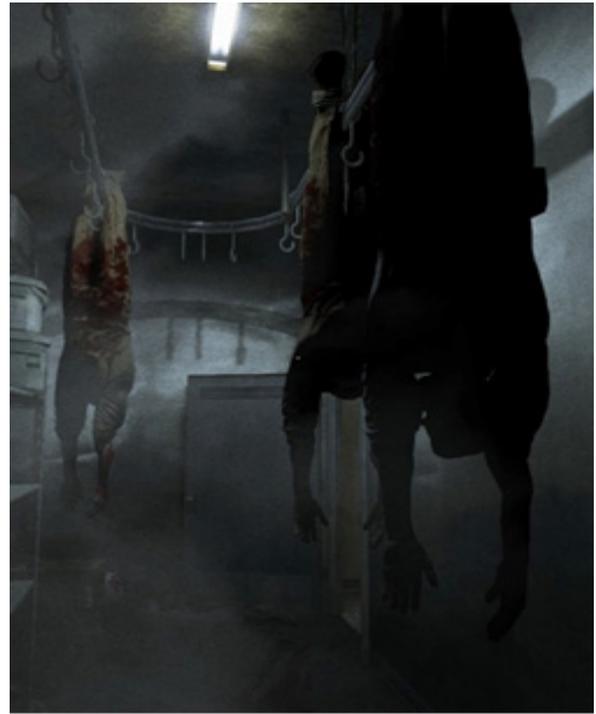
Unlike Trager, Manera is a former patient of the asylum rather than an executive. The document “Project Walrider Patient Status Report for Frank Manera,” which provides a glimpse into his background and life in Mount Massive before the institution collapses into anarchy, indicates that he would refuse to eat and had become “lethargic and non-responsive,” dropping from 228 to 155 pounds: “recommend forced nutrition for Mr. Manera if we cannot find something he likes to eat.” By the time of *Whistleblower*, Manera’s disinterest in food has dissipated and he indulges in rabid cannibal feasts, pursuing *Whistleblower*’s protagonist Waylon Park with a handheld electric buzzsaw and demanding that Waylon feed him. A grizzled, heavily-bearded, near-nude, perpetually gore-splattered man, Manera’s

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feral appearance and crude, ravenous dialogue mark him as an animalistic figure connected to base desires. In one notable scene he manages to capture Waylon in Mount Massive's morgue, throwing him into one of the crematoria to cook.

Manera's brief, growled dialogue resembles baby talk, as if he were a manifestation of pure Freudian id. He addresses Waylon as "meat" and repeatedly asserts a sense of acquisitive desire for his body, insisting that Waylon is "his forever" and that "the meat is mine." Unlike Chris Walker, another major antagonist whose murderous rampages are linked with military structures of containment, surveillance, and control, or Trager, whose sadistic experiments mirror the exploitative practices of neoliberalism and unethical science, Manera is driven only by imbecilic, hyperphagic appetite, by a pathological need to possess and consume. "He looks at me and I see anger," Waylon writes, "A little desire ... But more than anything, hunger." Manera's repeated characterization of Waylon as food and as a fetishized commodity "ready" and "red" engenders a kind of becoming-meat in the character and player, who are thrust into the uncomfortable role of prey animal and would-be meal.

This monstrous abattoir logic forms another locus of corporealization and materialist reduction. As Reyes notes, body gothic and what he calls the slaughterhouse novel in particular imagines the body as "the only plane of empiric certainty", stressing "the horrible reality that ... we are largely biological in essence" while foregrounding "the ease with which we may be revoked our rights and privileges", an objectifying process he refers to as "meatification" (*Body Gothic* 121,120,130). *Whistleblower* uses Frank Manera to accomplish a similar reduction of human bodies to the state of raw material, meatifying Waylon and, through the process of extended embodiment, the player controlling him. Manera thus reflects the insatiability of consumerism and its ethical vacuity when faced with the rights of living beings, as well as the institutional power of the corporate asylum and its objectification of the bodies it deems no better than animals.



As in the amputation sequence with Dr. Trager, Waylon's capture at Manera's greasy hands intensifies the experience of extended embodiment and corporeal reduction: the experience of being trapped in the body, trapped in meat. Much of Manera's affective efficacy and the meatification of human bodies is derived not from this cooking scene but from the gruesome *mise-en-scène* of the "Hospital" chapter in which Manera is encountered (see fig. 4). While navigating the hallways of this section the player is confronted with a series of images showcasing Manera's cannibal habits, images calculated to induce disgust. Components of the repulsive atmosphere include a simmering stew of blood and hands, corpses hanging from hooks like haunches of meat, a countertop strewn with human offal, and a man having his head explosively microwaved like a horrific hot pocket (see fig. 5).



Fig. 5. “Meatification” in the cannibal’s kitchen (Red Barrels, 2014).

This final image is so hideous that it prompts Waylon to scribble down a note to his wife abjecting *his own* body, insisting that Lisa “just bury it ... or burn it” so that Waylon’s sons can “remember [him] whole.” Waylon’s pre-emptive horror at the thought of his own mutilated cadaver suggests not only his hopelessness but his acute awareness of corporeality and a presentiment of deadness, his status as inert matter – as meat.

Korsmeyer argues that aesthetic experiences of overwhelming disgust can rival the sublime in their intensity, but where the sublime uplifts the subject, its disgusting counterpart, which she names the sublate, “apprehends not just destruction but reduction – of the noblest life to decaying organic matter in which all traces of individuality are obliterated” (134). For Korsmeyer, aesthetic emotions function in a cognitivist manner to “bring home general truths in a particularly vivid manner”, and disgust in particular gives rise to a visceral understanding of mortality and bodily vulnerability, registering “the inescapable, dolorous frailty of material existence” (134,158).

Korsmeyer’s theorization of sublate affect pairs well with Reyes’ notion of meatification. Presented with the disgusting spectacle of Manera’s cannibal kitchen, draped in blood-spattered plastic sheets like tatters of saran wrap, the player is bombarded with

a sublate tableau that seems designed to revolt. But rather than simply evoking what Stephen King might call the “gross-out” Manera’s sublate meatification of the human body draws our attention to *Whistleblower’s* biopolitical obsession with animalized, degraded, and dehumanized bodies – with bodies so reduced and demeaned they become a source of shame and self-disgust (25)<sup>5</sup>. *Whistleblower’s* interest in these affects and their social and political implications is borne out further in the game’s latter half, especially in the villainous character of The Groom and through the abominable surgeries he compulsively attempts.

### LOVE’S ARBOR

Though *Whistleblower* continues *Outlast’s* critique of unrestrained capitalism and science, it also turns its gaze towards other oppressive social structures. Its meditation on the horror of heteronormativity and the patriarchal materialisation of the sexed and gendered body is centred on Eddie Gluskin, a Variant and inmate known as “The Groom” or “The Man Downstairs.” A dapper and exaggeratedly courteous Blue-beard figure haunting the asylum’s vocational block, Gluskin is a victim of childhood sexual abuse at the hands of his father and uncle, according to the status report the player can discover. He forces other male inmates (since the asylum has no women) to act out a series of marriage fantasies, fantasies that climax in the surgical modification of his brides-to-be designed to physically feminize their “vulgar” masculine bodies, removing genitals and body hair and adding breasts.

Inevitably Gluskin deems his experiments in gender reassignment surgery to be failures and kills his “inadequate” victims, insisting that they have “given up on love” and stringing them up in a derelict gymnasium, a cadaverous cat’s cradle of pulleys and mutilated flesh. Eventually, Gluskin stalks and captures Waylon and attempts to make him his bride.

Waylon escapes before Gluskin can enact this surgical horror and manages to kill Gluskin by entangling him in the ropes suspending the corpses of his victims (see fig. 6).

<sup>5</sup> The “gross-out,” as King describes it, is the lowest common denominator of gothic affect which he ranks below the more rarefied affects of horror and terror (but to which he confesses to revert when incapable of producing the other two).



Fig. 6. Gluskin's "Bluebeard's Chamber" where his "wives" are strung up (Red Barrels, 2014).

The "Vocational Block" chapter of *Whistleblower* provides another unique corporeal experience via the extended embodiment of survival horror and the affective fusion of player and protagonist: the traumatic experience of being misgendered, and of being forced to conform to an unattainable ideal of femininity and so deemed abject. Gluskin's discursive and surgical violence reflects the everyday violence of heteronormativity and binary structures of gender. Judith Butler, in her seminal study of gender and performativity, *Gender Trouble* (1990), argues that the "immutable character" of sex is in fact culturally constructed alongside and through gender (9). She extends this argument in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) to suggest that sex and gender are social constructs imposed on individuals and reified through a series of performative acts or citations that fashion a subject into the semblance of an ideal they can never fully maintain:

... 'sex' is a regulatory ideal, whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process where-

by regulatory norms materialize 'sex' through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. (*Bodies that Matter* 1-2)

Those bodies that conspicuously fail to materialize themselves within the exclusionary heterosexual matrix are rendered abject, what Butler calls "the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject" (*Bodies that Matter* 3). This designation recalls Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, that which is neither subject nor object but which "disturbs identity, system, order" (4) and so must be cast out in order to constitute and maintain the boundaries of subjectivity.

Gluskin's obsessive refashioning of bodies and meticulous self-presentation exactly reflect the processes Butler describes through a defamiliarized gothic lens, reinforcing an especially rigid set of traditional gender norms. The Groom's immaculate dress, superficial charm, and folksy rhapsodizing about the joys of married life all strengthen his association with a particularly antiquated form of heteronormativity. He refers to Waylon and his other brides as "darling" and insists that Waylon "think of our children" in order to bear the pain of un-anesthetized castration. "I want you to have my baby," he tells Waylon, and so must create "a soft place to welcome [his] seed" and so "grow our family."

Repeatedly appealing to an idealized image of the nuclear family and the supposed biological destiny of women, Gluskin imposes his own set of regulatory norms onto his domain, norms culled from a nostalgically imagined paradigm of patriarchy. His ominous rendition of Harry Von Tilzer and William Dillion's barbershop song "I Want a Girl (Just Like The Girl That Married Dear Old Dad)" (1911) further solidifies his connection to the past and its more aggressively enforced gender roles while also foreshadowing Gluskin's grotesque surgical slayings:

When I was a boy my mother often  
said to me

Get married boy and see how happy  
you will be  
I have looked all over, but no girlie  
can I find,  
Who seems to be just like the little  
girl I have in mind,  
I will have to look around until the  
right one I have found.

These lyrics suggest Gluskin's fixation with an unattainable ideal of feminine beauty, a fixation that evidently existed before his incarceration in Mount Massive given his previous proclivities as a serial killer of women: while obviously dissatisfied with the "vulgar" male bodies of his captives with their "unsightly hairs," his frustration cannot be reduced to essentialist terms, since his inability to find "the little girl [he has] in mind" back-projects his misogynistic fetishization of the "fairer sex" to before his time in the asylum. As Waylon observes in the note "Blue Beard's Wives," Gluskin isn't "making women to bear his children, he's making women to kill them," no matter what he tells himself.

Butler insists that gender and sex are never fully materialized. Since differentiated gender construction is not an act but a process, a series of reiterated citations of a norm, inevitably "gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm" (*Bodies that Matter*, 10). When such excess becomes obtrusive enough to expose the artificiality of gender construction it is deemed abject and "delegitimated," such that excessive bodies "fail to count as 'bodies'" at all (*Bodies that Matter*, 15). As Butler notes it is the threat of this abjection that underlies performativity and enforces gender conformity, a threat "that compels the assumption of masculine and feminine attributes" (*Bodies that Matter*, 103). Abject bodies are bodies which have ceased to matter, bodies which the social order disavows as less than human – what Jack Halberstam calls "bodies that splatter" (138).

Gluskin, faced with the repeated failure of his surgical materialization of female bodies, inevitably kills his victims, insisting that they've "given up on love" and become "ugly" before stringing them up in

his Bluebeard's chamber. Even Waylon, who seems compassionate for the murdered men, refers to them in objectified, meatified, abject terms, as "wet laundry" and "skinned rabbits." Tellingly, as soon as Gluskin's brides disappoint him, he abjects them, ceasing to refer to them as "darling" and instead terming them "filthy" or "ungrateful sluts." When Waylon, inevitably, becomes abject, discarded for failing to meet Gluskin's ideal, The Groom tells him that he doesn't "even deserve to live," condemning him as "just another whore."

### A FEW SNIPS OF THE FLESH

As Eddie Gluskin tries to make Waylon an "honest woman" in his heteronormative fantasy of marriage and the nuclear family, he repeatedly describes his victim in feminized terms, complimenting his "amazing bone structure" and "soft skin" and comparing him to a fragile flower which he notes "needs nourishing, and pruning, and care," an image whose subtle violence in the name of aesthetics discursively foreshadows his surgical materialization of femaleness. His vision of womanhood also emphasizes pain and corporeality. While euphemistically describing his surgical alterations as "a few snips of the flesh," he also warns Waylon that the process of materialization will be painful: "a woman ... has to suffer some things ... the incision will hurt, and the conception, and birthing is never easy." His close attention to the body in pain is complimented by the game's usurpation of player agency and its recourse to a masochistic form of ludic experience and spectatorship. Crucially, as with Trager's surgery, ludonarrative dissonance is averted – or at least mitigated – insofar as the player's lack of agency mirrors the protagonist's: during the moments the player lacks power, their powerlessness mirrors that of the strapped-down, drugged protagonist, equally bereft of agency. The sense of extended embodiment *Outlast* carefully cultivates is thus strengthened rather than threatened by a lack of control.

A variety of techniques further heighten the sense of embodiment the player is invited to participate in during Waylon's numerous encounters with Gluskin. Throughout the "Vocational Block" chapter the player can hear Waylon's heart pounding in his chest. At one point Waylon becomes injured, falling down an elevator shaft and hurting his leg in his

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attempt to evade the misogynistic rapist and depraved amateur surgeon; his pain, much like Mile's after his fingers are amputated, is represented by a throbbing, flashing screen and punctuated by Waylon's screams. Following this injury Waylon's speed is noticeably reduced, the screen lurching as he limps through the shadowy, blood-smearred corridors, enhancing the player's awareness of the protagonist's wounded body.

Waylon's surgery takes place in a cut-scene following his capture by the Groom, and once again undercuts the player's feeling of power, entrapping them in a state of masochistic spectatorship. Throughout *Outlast* the player can direct the protagonists to hide in lockers found in the asylum; while, occasionally, enemies can locate the protagonists in such lockers, usually they pass them by, provided the player was able to hide without being seen entering the locker. After an especially frenzied chase with Gluskin, players are faced with what seems to be a dead end with a sole locker as a potential hiding spot, but upon entering the locker they are discovered by Gluskin, who floods the locker with sedative gas and hauls it back to his workshop. The moment may feel unfair, since it effectively denies the player any chance of escape, much as the dumbwaiter in the male ward in *Outlast* functions as a trap for Trager. Transitioning from the highly agentic experience of an obstacle-laden chase to a cinematic model of spectatorship, then, *Whistleblower* accentuates an awareness of corporeality before suddenly stripping its player of choice, reducing them to a powerless captive in a cruel and unjust world. Dominated by Gluskin and the patriarchal law he represents, the player experiences a defamiliarized version of sex materialization and abjection.

When Waylon awakens from his drug-induced torpor the player finds him strapped to a wooden table, limbs bound, a whirring saw buzzing at one end of the table, aimed at his groin (see fig. 7). As with Frank Manera, the *mise-en-scène* of the vocational block contributes to an atmosphere of horror, here setting up a perverse air of domesticity with rows of sewing machines. Gluskin's connection to tailoring further draws attention to the costume-like, performative nature of gender and sex, its ostentatious social constructedness, while also perhaps functioning as a subtle allusion to

Buffalo Bill of Thomas Harri's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), who, like The Groom, manufactures genre through murderous surgery. But where Bill's pathology was his antipathy to gender identity – Halberstam calls him “a man imitating gender, exaggerating gender, and finally attempting to shed his gender in favor of a new skin” – Gluskin horrifies insofar as he exemplifies and literalizes the violence of gender and sex construction (167).

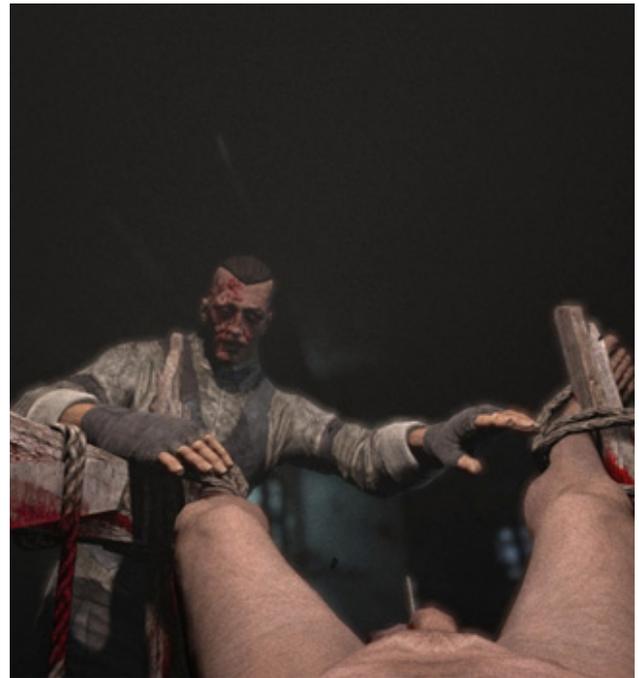


Fig. 7. Eddie Gluskin attempts forced gender reassignment surgery on Waylon (Red Barrels, 2014).

While Waylon is spared mutilation, the surgical scene still constitutes one of the most vivid moments of bodily violation in *Whistleblower*, exploiting mechanisms of extended embodiment to produce an especially intense affective-corporeal response. The full-frontal male nudity in Gluskin's sequence of surgical horror is unusual for a video game and underscores Waylon's bodily vulnerability. In contrast with slasher films such as those keenly analyzed by Carol Clover in her influential study, *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992), in which first person camera represents “the killer's point of view”, we remain locked in the victim, Waylon's, first person viewpoint, imprisoned in his body (45). In this moment and in the chase sequences surrounding the botched surgery Waylon himself be-

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comes a kind of unusual “Final Girl.” Like Ellen Ripley of *Alien* (1979) or Stretch in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986), to name just two of many possible examples, Waylon possesses a mixture of masculine and feminine traits, having been repeatedly and mercifully feminized by Gluskin. As with other Final Girls and protagonists of rape-revenge narratives, Waylon flips the script on Gluskin and manages to kill him, entrapping him in the tangled web of constraints containing his past victims and impaling him on a phallic metal spike.

Jay McRoy argues that “what is at stake in Survival Horror is not the ‘fate’ of the virtual hero/heroine with which the game player/spectator identifies, but the very politics of cultural affiliation and logics of personal identity” (21). In *Whistleblower*, masochistic spectatorship of and identification with Waylon’s restrained, vulnerable, misgendered, and physically threatened body allows for a powerful corporeal-affective experience of abjection. The game uses both representational and videoludic techniques to invite players to experience Waylon’s body as an extension of their own and so to undergo a dynamic process of disempowerment and abjection. This process sets up the cathartic destruction of Waylon’s victimizer using the very constraints by which he perpetuated his system of control. Here, as with Dr. Trager’s surgery, the player and protagonist are ultimately aligned and encouraged to identify with the patients themselves, fighting back against those that have caused them suffering.

### MORPHOGENESIS

*Outlast* ends with Miles’s murder of Billy Hope, the host for the Walrider nanoswarm and the ultimate manifestation of Murkoff’s scientific machinations. Before proceeding down to the eerie laboratory in which this murder takes place – a murder framed more as a mercy-killing than an act of retributive violence – Miles watches as Father Martin, his shepherd throughout the game, is crucified and immolated by his followers. This “penultimate act of witness” sets the stage for the transformation to come: after Miles kills Billy, the Walrider selects him as its new host. Martin repeatedly describes Miles as his “apostle” and his “witness” and compares him to Abraham and other Biblical figures. He insists that Miles “watch and record [his] death,

[his] resurrection” and tell the world the truth; Miles, in the note “The Passion of Father Martin,” writes that Martin wants him “to spread his gospel,” a promulgation he is at this point more than willing to undertake. By acting as a witness, recording and chronicling the pain of those at Mount Massive and, indeed, enduring pain himself, Miles embodies an unconventional mode of heroism linked to spectatorship and suffering, a mode the player is invited to identify with. Ironically, it is this very suffering that makes Miles vulnerable to the Walrider.

The Walrider itself is the product of a process called “Morphogenesis,” the operation of the Morphogenic Engine devised by Dr. Wernicke. In an exit interview with Wernicke recorded in Los Alamos, the mad scientist explains that, in Nazi Germany in 1943, the nation was gripped by a mixture of “overwhelming fear” and “ecstatic rage,” affective states for which “English words are insufficient,” and that enable a human mind to accomplish “extraordinary things.” He posits that, to be successful, the Morphogenic Engine requires “a proximity to death” and “overwhelming madness.” As Miles scribbles in the note “The Wernicke Exit Interview” upon seeing the film, the process “seems to walk a line between science and Nazi mysticism.” The invocation of the Holocaust and the other horrors of WWII brings to the fore concerns over which bodies matter and which do not, as well as structures of biopower and dehumanization. The Walrider makes corporeal not only the nightmares of history but the very experience of suffering. What seems at first an otherworldly spirit, a spectral apparition haunting Mount Massive, is revealed as a physical manifestation of pain and horror, a materialization of trauma.

Like Frankenstein’s monster, the Walrider punishes its Promethean creators. Murkoff’s crime was not in transgressing the limits of human power or violating some sacred boundary, however, but in treating the bodies of its charges as expendable, as nothing more than abject raw material for its workshop of filthy creation. *Outlast* must therefore be read as more than a cautionary tale about the dangers of scientific hubris, a theme already thoroughly explored by games like *Half-Life* (Valve, 1998) or *Resident Evil*. The Walrider symbolizes not a crime against nature but a crime against

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people – against vulnerable bodies, those written off as useless or inconsequential. As one inmate puts it to Miles: “Murkoff took so much from us. Used us. Turned us into these things because no one cares about a few forgotten lunatics.” Murkoff’s almost cartoonish malevolence only flourishes because of a society quietly complicit with its corporate malignity, a society that pointedly looks the other way. *Outlast*, with its graphic violence and call to witness, insists that players never look away, that they gaze instead on uncomfortable truths.

*Outlast* attests to the potential of the horror genre in general and survival horror video games in particular to incite empathy for the marginalized, abject, and dispossessed while providing a critique of oppressive social structures that regulate bodies, deeming which matter and which do not according to a rubric of capitalistic utility or patriarchal control. Simultaneously drawing on and subverting the videoludic conventions and techniques of the survival horror genre, *Outlast* possesses a visceral aesthetics of suffering, coupling representations of pained and mutilated bodies with the corporeal-affective embodiment of players to collapse the difference between players and protagonists, immersing them in a scopophilic and surprisingly sociopolitical bloodbath.

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***Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic, and the Found Footage Phenomenon.* Edited by Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes. (London, I.B. Tauris, 2016. 180 pages, £59.50.) ISBN: 978-1-78453-025-9**

Erika Rothberg  
Loyola Marymount University

*Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic, and the Found Footage Phenomenon* takes a fascinating approach to emerging technologies as they relate to hauntings and social connectivity. This collection, edited by Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes, could not have existed a few decades ago; with the rise of social media and the relatively recent post-*Blair Witch Project* boom in found footage films comes a need to examine both our fixation with and fears of this new technological era. The book is comprised of three sections: “Haunted Technologies and Network Panic,” “Digital Horror and the Postnational,” and “Digital Stylistics.” “Haunted Technologies and Network Panic” focuses on the use of cameras, technology, and closed-circuit television in recent horror films. “Digital Horror and the Postnational” explores the use of CCTV and technology in relationship to political/global issues examined in horror films from around the world. “Digital Stylistics” explores the uses of different filming techniques (such as night vision and handheld cameras) within found footage films. Every chapter in this collection is effective; each contributor brings a unique interpretation of exactly what is at stake within recent horror films exploring our role as humans in a digital age.

One of the strongest—and most immediately distinguishing—aspects of this collection of essays is the cultural diversity amongst the films examined. While many are American and British movies, films from other countries that have been comparatively overlooked are explored in detail here—primarily Turkish, Serbian, Cambodian, and Thai horror films. In her chapter, “Djinn in the Machine: Technology and Islam in Turkish Horror Film,” Zeynep Sahinturk does a brilliant job situating this “nascent” national genre by citing its roots in Western horror films to explain how Turkish horror emerged as a truly “transnational” genre (95-96). Her exploration of the increased attention from

Turkish filmmakers to use “Islamic myths as the generator of horror” is fascinating (95). She connects this use of Islamic myths with surveillance; she notes that a Turkish film franchise, *D@bbe*, takes an idea from the Qur’an: “the djinns see us from a place that we cannot see them” (99). Sahinturk bridges the gaps between ancient religious myths to modern horror by connecting the fear of being watched by something unwatchable present in both Turkish myths and films. She links this fear to restrictive internet policies enacted by the Turkish government, explaining that “the idea of being controlled politically through digital media has become very prominent in the popular imagination” (100). Sahinturk’s chapter illuminates a burgeoning horror genre that seriously deserves attention from scholars worldwide; key questions of nationalism and identity seem to be a red thread connecting many of the essays in *Digital Horror*, in both Western and non-Western films.

Another sub-category of found footage horror, torture porn, has been undergoing a resurgence within the last fifteen years. The critical attention devoted in this edited collection to modern torture porn is important, as much of the prior scholarship devoted to this subgenre focuses on the splatter films of the 1960s-1980s. In two chapters, “Torture Pornopticon: (In)security Cameras, Self Governance and Autonomy” by Steve Jones, and “Welcome to the Reality Studio: Serbian Hand-held Horrors” by Dejan Ognjanovi, the concept of torture porn is examined in light of its relationship to CCTV, identity, and group dynamics. In his chapter, Jones argues that all spaces in a torture porn are panoptical (29). He applies Foucault’s findings from his essay on the Panopticon prison to modern torture porn films, situating torture porn’s “locked box” spaces as Foucauldian environments in which subordinates are “forbidden to leave on pain of death” (31). Jones uses these spaces to analyze power dynamics between

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abductor and abductee (noting the “perversely flattering” interest captors exert towards their prey, who have been deemed worthy of attention) before moving on to focus on relationships between co-abductees (33). He argues that, in torture porn films with multiple victims, these co-prisoners eventually turn their backs on one another; Jone’s essay ultimately concludes by speculating that torture porn functions as a warning “that individual complicity and weakness are more terrifying than outright oppression, since the latter is facilitated by the former” (39).

However, for Ognjanovi, torture porn serves a very different function. He argues that two Serbian horror films, *The Life and Death of a Porno Gang* and the now-notorious *A Serbian Film*, use torture porn to self-direct vengeance at Serbian cinema itself. Ognjanovi explains that *A Serbian Film*’s meta title announces to us that this is going to be a “violent redefinition of [Serbian cinema]” (83). Ognjanovi reads the most widely abhorred scene from a horror film in recent memory—the infamous “newborn rape” scene—as more than just shock value: it is “pornography of the soul, the ultimate degradation of the born and unborn” (85). It is a commentary on Serbian directors “seeking to attract foreign funds” by participating in degrading acts; while this scene is to be read as a “highly metaphorical” statement, its function is to warn Serbian filmmakers that their films “will be saleable commodities for as long as Serbia is perceived as Europe’s excremental Other” (85, 92). Torture porn is situated in highly theoretical functions in these two chapters, which both posit the subgenre as central to power relationships on intra- and inter-societal levels.

Other equally intriguing chapters in the collection are concerned not just with observation, but with supernatural and/or digital hauntings. In his chapter, “Networked Spectrality: *In Memorium, Pulse* and Beyond,” Neal Kirk proposes an exciting new theoretical concept: networked spectrality. Networked spectrality, Kirk explains, is a way to “read a current of cultural productions that construct the internet and other digital devices as sources of fear and potential haunting” (55). His chapter looks at the oft-dismissed *Pulse* as a film offering haunted digital spaces—technological hauntings, literal ghosts in the machine. Kirk’s research is particularly relevant; as he notes, “digital nightmares awake as technological development continues to proliferate” (64). He intends his work to be a new framework that we can use to evaluate “the complexities of the relationship between technology, death and spectrality,” which is constantly changing and growing as new technologies emerge (64). Kirk’s

work, I suspect, will become increasingly needed, as our dependence on digital technology continues to grow, leaving in its wake a new realm of possible sites of exploration (like Facebook memorial pages.)

Xavier Aldana Rey’s chapter, “The [*REC*] Films: Affective Possibilities and Stylistic Limitations of Found Footage Horror,” wraps up the collection with cutting insight into the titular “found footage phenomenon.” Reyes makes the important distinction that found footage should be viewed as a mode rather than a subgenre, despite the popular viewpoint that found footage is its own subgenre. With this in mind, he reads found footage films as films where “the story is virtually inseparable from the means by which it is told” (150). Reyes analyzes The [*REC*] films; he claims that the documentary and testimonial filming styles used in the films are factors in the creation of “meditated affective horror” (155). He explores the technical aspects of filming, concluding that this successful franchise understands “viewership as an inherently participatory experience” (157). Reyes claims that the future success of the found footage mode will depend on whether or not filmmakers can “continue to exploit and transcend the very specific stylistics” that distinguish the mode as one relying on its unique form of verisimilitude (157).

It is extremely clear why this particular edited collection is needed. Privacy and security issues continue to grow as we become more and more reliant on the internet and digital technology. *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic, and the Found Footage Phenomenon* critically examines these fears in an extremely relevant way. The collection is thorough, clear, and cutting; in its relatively slim one hundred and eighty pages, hundreds of films are examined and referenced. I would love to see another collection with a similar theme, perhaps also expanded to include narratives based on cyber-bullying and cyber-vigilantism; since this collection is largely about observation, I would be very interested to see what *Digital Horror*’s contributors would have to say about active participation in the digital age.

***Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film.*  
 Edited by Wickam Clayton. (Hampshire: Palgrave  
 Macmillan, 2015. 254 pages, \$100.00). ISBN 978-1-  
 137-49646-1**

Sarah R. Young  
 Old Dominion University

In the recent text, *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film*, editor and contributor Wickam Clayton provides a compelling look deep into old wounds and fresh cuts of slasher cinema. Carefully selected and compiled, each of the fourteen unique essays from film and horror experts and scholars will thrill readers, especially those who find themselves curious to know more about stylistic choices and theoretical underpinnings of the slasher or broader horror/Gothic connections. Each author's chapter showcases that the volume itself is an exercise in different style and form in approaches to the content. *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* serves both new and seasoned film viewers and scholars well with its wide-ranging choices, organizational coherence, and analytical breadth.

Preceding formal chapters of the text, Clayton offers a thorough introduction, appropriately titled "The Collection Awakens," in which he gives background to the slasher subgenre, as well as Formalism, providing readers with terminological boundaries relative to the purview of the text. Clayton's introduction is aptly sectioned, foreshadowing the organization of the rest of the book. Clayton begins his introduction by reminding readers that Leon Trostky once "warned of the dangers of formalism" (1). Addressing some such potential dangers, Clayton convincingly argues, however, that there is value in reexamining the "utility and moral propriety of formalism", particularly as it relates to understanding slasher cinema (2). A succinct background and timeline of slasher cinema are presented, including production dates of some of the 'first' slashers, as well as dates and films significant to the evolving horror subgenre. The inclusion is a gentle reminder for readers with previous knowledge and also a concise welcome for any newcomers. Clayton gives a brief outline for the text, noting section headings and chapter titles for the expectant reader; this outline is perhaps overly

lengthy, albeit well-intentioned. However, by the end of the introduction, Clayton's goal in publishing this text is evident: "to redress the imbalance of scholarly work on the slasher" to "fill an existing gap in film analysis" (13–14).

The first section of the text is titled "The Birth, Death, and Revenge of the Hollywood Slasher," and is composed of four chapters that analyze both iconic slashers and some less frequently studied works. For instance, Chapter One discusses two unlikely choices, *When a Stranger Calls* and *Eyes of a Stranger*, released during a critical time (late 1970s/early 1980s) for the slasher film genre. The analysis considers these films' contributions to the hybridization of subgenres—the slasher-thriller model—by way of altered focalization of both the killer and the spectator. This inclusion signifies the importance of the "birth", or inception period, of classic slasher films overall, while also successfully beginning a discussion about evolving slasher subgenre identification that reemerges throughout the volume. Chapter Two addresses the failure—or "death"—of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part V* at the box office, and its condemnation in critical circles. However, close analysis of *Part V*'s "narrative perversity and formal incoherence" actually indicates the film's cinematic merit (Clayton 49).

Chapter Three examines the significance of continued prioritization of "form over content with a focus on symbolism" in the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series (Shimabukuro 52). This is explored by way of David Bordwell's six tenets of modernist tradition, each critique supporting what we should identify as a "functional aesthetic" of *Elm Street*. Not only is a single film's narrative built by this aesthetic, the franchise's narrative is built over time and production because of it as well.

One of the most compelling chapters of the entire collection, Chapter Four, "*Candyman* and *Saw*: Reimagining

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the Slasher through Urban Gothic,” by Stacey Abbott, begins with a discussion of the traditional literary Gothic. Abbott argues that contemporary manifestations of previously Gothicized locations and spaces are found in decaying American city centers, such as those presented in the title films. Both films manifest an urbanized reframing of Carol Clover’s “terrible place” trope, further aestheticizing the space itself and the death of the victims, resulting in yet another hybrid genre: “the Gothic slasher.” This first section reveals that continually revisiting past films, associated criticism, and theoretical modes is crucial to understanding the progression of the slasher subgenre. Readers may be tempted to skip the first two chapters of this section, simply because the films discussed are not as iconic or recent as those discussed in the remaining chapters—do not skip them.

The second section of the text titled “Older, Darker, and More Self-Aware,” is occupied with understanding conventions and distinctions in various subgenres of the Hollywood slasher subgenre. This is decidedly the most complex section of the text, due to the sheer nature of how many subgenres and hybrids are mentioned, defined, and explained. Though quite short, Chapter Five presents *Halloween H20* as the transcendental “neo-slasher,” as its organized self-reflexivity and franchise intertextuality elevates viewers’ “insider knowledge”, making it distinct from late 90s slasher films. In Chapter Six, Mark Richard Adams showcases the merit of *Valentine*, a postmodern, neo-slasher that focuses less on “shadows and darkness” and more on the excessive use of color and graphic imagery (93). Adams respectfully challenges Thomas Sipo’s definition of the horror genre, claiming too much rigidity limits our understanding, which can unjustly impact cinematic observation and analytical treatment. Supporting this challenge by including Brigid Cherry’s “strengths of horror,” Adams suggests that films such as *Valentine* are excluded from formulaic identification due to their unconventional aesthetics, particularly during the late 1990s/early 2000s (94). Such discussion compels readers to reexamine previously-held generic distinctions based on normative aesthetics between subgenres of more psychological versus physical horror in a slasher context. Chapter Seven offers even more detailed subgenre distinction for the slasher, noting significant pre-, key (classic), and post-slasher examples. Conrich argues and provides direct evidence for the emergence of the grand slasher films. Both *Saw* and *Final Destination* fit this criterion, because they both employ the puzzle-like grand narrative required. In Chapter Eight, Matthew Freeman continues the part of Chapter

Seven’s discussion regarding *Saw*, also noting its significance as a Hollywood slasher to its construction as a “Puzzle Film Horror,” as originally defined by Warren Buckland. Freeman makes a connection that is sure to remain with readers long after the chapter’s conclusion: John Kramer and *Saw*, as both puzzler and puzzle, are descendants of more classic slashers and their villains, including *Halloween*/Michael Meyers and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*/Freddy Krueger. Some readers—those who are less interested in *Saw*—may find the consecutive chapters on the film a tad redundant, particularly regarding the puzzle film/narrative discussion.

“Resurrecting *Carrie*” is the ninth chapter, marking the second section’s finality. Here, Bettinson addresses the resistance of critics to substantiate *Carrie* (both the original and remake) as a slasher or any associated slasher subgenre. Arguing against this resistance, Bettinson highlights the similarities between *Carrie* and *Psycho*, showcasing the merits of the former as being consistent with narrative, adaptive, and stylistic conventions of the slasher by way of the latter, which is often considered to be a precursor to the slasher film. This chapter should not be overlooked; the historical grounding it gives *Psycho* is important to understand the evolution of slasher horror. More technical in its approach, readers can expect to spend more time with this section of the volume than the other two.

The final section, “Form Versus Theory,” concludes the volume. Chapter Ten addresses specific considerations of form (citing both Carol Clover and Alfred Hitchcock) and theoretical perspectives (including those of Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard) as applied to *Scream*. Concluding the chapter, readers are convinced that labeling the *Scream* series as parody misses deeper postmodern implications of the film. Instead, Chapter Ten successfully argues that *Scream* can be used to rebuild or reimagine the slasher as a subgenre, because of the subgenre manipulation and narrative self-reflexivity it employs.

Chapter Eleven excites with its focus on the villain or killer in the slasher, particularly as seen in *Fallen*, *In Dreams*, and *Frailty*. This effectiveness of the chapter has less to do with the specific films discussed and more with its argument that the supernatural nature of the villain seen or alluded to in many classic slashers has recently reemerged, thus employing supernatural slasher genre self-reflexivity to propel continued interest. There is a stark shift in content between this and the next chapter, which is a bit jarring. Chapter Twelve is poignant with an argument of the presence of “closeted-ness” in slashers, where the erotic treatment

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of bodies is understood in terms of Slasher “queer-ing” in contemporary slashers and remakes of older slashers, such as Nispel’s 2003 remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. This particular chapter, as well as the final chapter of the text, may interest readers who also have interest in the field(s) of gender and sexuality. Chapter Thirteen tackles a changing formulaic approach to realities of horror and surveillance as seen in “Neopostmodern Horror,” ranging from *The Blair Witch Project* to *Paranormal Activity*. The relation to slasher cinema seems lacking at first, but the chapter eventually establishes underlying aesthetic and thematic connections when it suggests, “all bodies are meat” (Och 209). The chapter showcases the slasher’s wide reach, particularly in a post-9/11 world where technology meets voyeurism.

The final chapter of the text, by Janet Staiger, takes on the task of “revising” Carol Clover’s analysis of general conventions of the slasher, particularly genre formula and an aesthetic of psychologically-motivated gendered violence, as originally presented in Clover’s *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*. Staiger brings in *Psycho*, *Halloween*, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, and *Nightmare on Elmstreet* to illustrate limitations of Clover’s original argument as well as limitations of it when applied to *Carrie*, leaving readers to consider how women and girls may or may not end up as “Final Girls”. Staiger’s inclusion of detailed tables regarding psychological disorders and heroes/heroines/endings supports the analysis. Ending the chapter and the volume, Staiger argues that the pervasive physical and psychological horrors of the slasher are crucial for and constants of a successful and timeless genre formula.

*Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* marks a significant milestone for the slasher subgenre but also for horror and film studies. Presenting original analysis of understudied and underestimated slashers is a bold move, but a successful one, due to the careful examination and detailed analysis of each film presented. This volume not only addresses a variety of stylistic and formulaic slasher models, it also takes care to acknowledge the slasher’s relation to preceding horror texts and Gothic cinematic and literary traditions. Clayton’s edition is certain to appeal to a wide readership, since it is advanced enough for those seasoned in the subject while ensuring clear definitions and explanations for more novice audiences. Some sections of the text are theoretically and terminologically dense but not impassable. *Style and Form* is witty and funny at times, too, which helps to build a reader-text rapport. Clayton and his co-authors succeed in showcasing that analyses of and scholarship on the slasher are not only important for the sake of the subgenre

itself as it has existed and exists now, but also for the sake of a better understanding of what is yet to come. Highly recommended, *Style and Form in the Hollywood Slasher Film* is sure to be a critical text in areas of film and horror/Gothic studies.

***Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children's Literature.* By Michael Howarth. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2014. 196 pages, \$40.00). ISBN 978-0-7864-7843-9**

Jaquelin Elliott  
University of Florida

Last year's Children's Literature Association Conference was one that caught my attention, as well as that of many other scholars working with Gothicism – "The High Stakes and Dark Sides of Children's Literature," an open-ended call for panels on horror, death, violence, trauma, and anything else dealing with the darker, more subversive elements that thread through so much of children's literature. Indeed, for many children, there is an undeniable attraction to the strange, dark, and terrifying that can be plainly recognized in books children so often love best. The question is why? Is it simply the taboo of it? Wanting to experience something that their parents have denied them? Or is this issue, if we can even call it that, more complex? Is horror as cathartic for children as it is for adults? Does gothic horror give children an outlet in which they can safely confront their anxieties?

These are questions directly addressed in Michael Howarth's *Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children's Literature*, a book which, while academic in nature, Howarth is hoping can also help parents recognize the ways that Gothic literature can be a catalyst for children's identity formation. While asking readers to consider "How dark is too dark?" when it comes to children's literature, Howarth nevertheless encourages the reading of Gothic literature by children, stressing its power and appeal for young readers: "Learning to conquer our fears and establish our independence is what makes Gothicism an effective teaching tool for children" (8). Without the safely enclosed introduction to fear that Gothic literature provides, Howarth argues, "children may enter adolescence unprepared to resolve intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts like puberty, sex, relationships, and peer-pressure" (8).

In the book's preface, Howarth states that children's literature's status as a relatively new field in academia has, up until recently, marginalized scholarship on its relation to the Gothic (though the fact that he cites Bettelheim's now

40-year-old *The Uses of Enchantment* does beg the question just how new the field of children's literature is). Howarth acknowledges works like *The Uses of Enchantment*, which apply psychoanalysis to children's literature but do not focus on the Gothic, as well as works such as *The Gothic in Children's Literature* that address Gothicism in children's literature but do not make use of psychoanalysis. For his purposes, Howarth is intent on doing both, stressing the importance of psychoanalysis in understanding how Gothic elements can function in children's development and resolution of individual crises.

Howarth lays out his psychoanalytic methodology in the introduction, briefly explicating the work of Erik Erikson whom Howarth chose for his psychosocial approach, which Howarth believes will be more illuminating in the examination of gothic elements in children's literature than, say, Freud's psychosexual approach. Erikson divides the human life cycle into nine stages of psychosocial development, each stage having its own warring emotions and specific moment of crisis that must be resolved before one can hope to move on to the next stage. Gothicism, Howarth argues, can aid in the discovery and resolution of each of these fundamental crises (14). Howarth examines only the five of Erikson's nine stages that pertain to childhood and adolescence, using various works of children's literature that employ the Gothic as case studies for each stage.

Beginning with Stage 2: Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt, Howarth begins his analysis with Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, a work whose eroticism has been thoroughly analyzed by scholars but whose Gothicism has not been. Picking up on the theme of temptation in Rossetti's "tortured fairy tale about two young girls confronted with supernatural evil" (24), Howarth places special emphasis on the poem's gothic elements, including the uncanny goblin men, Laura's physical wasting away, the dreamlike quality of the landscape, and the sing-song, almost trance-like, rhythm of the poem

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itself. All of these, Howarth argues, help to heighten the sense of anxiety felt by child readers that allows them to experience Laura and Lizzie's traumatic ordeal themselves.

For Stage 3: Initiative versus Guilt, Howarth performs an analysis of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*, a text he recognizes may not be one that immediately comes to mind when readers think of Gothic children's literature. This chapter analyzes Pinocchio's courage and inhibition and the inclusion of Gothic themes in Collodi's novel, which reflects childhood development, including gloomy and even traumatic experiences.

Then, in one of the stronger chapters of the book, Howarth analyzes Neil Gaiman's gothic horror novel *Coraline* in relation to Stage 4: Industry versus Inferiority. Howarth tracks Coraline's growing competence and independence as she fights to save her parents from the ghoulish Other Mother, who, in true gothic fashion, serves as the dark double of her own mother. This chapter is one of the book's most analytically rich, though this is little surprise given that *Coraline's* more traditional gothic structure/symbolism offers a great deal to be explicated, from the mirror imagery, to the Other Mother, to the claustrophobic landscape that is always shifting to reflect Coraline's interiority.

For Erikson's fifth stage: Identity versus Role Confusion, Howarth takes on three versions of *Little Red Riding Hood*: Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood," the Grimm Brothers' "Little Red Cap," and the folktale "The Story of Grandmother." This trilogy, Howarth rightly argues, presents children with various methods of coping with sexual discovery, gender confusion, and confronting the darker sides of human natures – issues that are of particular relevance in the liminal space of adolescence. Howarth examines the Gothic elements of each tale, stressing how these "function to remind parents and children that sexual awakening is a normal part of life and should not be repressed by adults who want to seal children in a padded box and keep them safe from nothing more than natural curiosity and physical desires" (19).

Howarth finishes his analysis with a look at J.M. Barrie's novel *Peter and Wendy* for Stage 6: Intimacy versus Isolation. Like with *Pinocchio*, Howarth argues that the Gothic elements of *Peter and Wendy*, which, of course, pick up on anxieties about growing up and forming sexual relationships, have been largely under-discussed by scholars. An examination of these Gothic elements proves especially pertinent for Howarth's larger psychosocial argument that Gothicism functions as a catalyst for children's personal growth. For, while the dark and traumatic elements of

Neverland affect Wendy, sparking her development, Peter refuses to allow these things to affect him and, consequently, remains in stasis.

Howarth concludes with an epilogue (or "One Last Gasp," as he calls it), once more stressing the importance of Gothicism and horror for children's development, but conceding that "like all medicine [darkness] should be administered in small doses" (163). Nevertheless, Howarth encourages readers not to fall into the trap of underestimating children's resilience when they are more than capable of and willing to engage with darker themes in their media. This exposure is especially important not only for catalyzing personal development, but also for ensuring children who may be trying to reconcile anxieties or even dealing with trauma that they are not alone in the dark.

As someone specializing in both children's literature and horror, I am pleased to see the darker aspects of children's literature receiving some solid academic attention and *Under the Bed, Creeping* is no exception. While, at times, it does feel that Howarth is conflating Gothic and non-Gothic horror in his analyses, he nevertheless makes strong arguments for the inclusion of works (*Pinocchio*, *Peter and Wendy*) that have not necessarily been considered Gothic in the past. This serves for some refreshing analysis, but also underscores the importance of a broader consideration of the Gothic mode and its widespread diffusion throughout literature. Howarth situates his work by acknowledging the marginalized status of both children's literature and the Gothic in academia (as well as how this marginalization is now slowly shifting), and *Under the Bed* is a much welcome examination of the largely ignored intersection between these two fields.

Indeed, many of *Under the Bed's* strongest moments come in his defense of the academic merit of horror, the Gothic, and the importance of giving these works to children, a defense that is itself cathartic to anyone with an interest in these fields or anyone who, like Howarth, can still recall the delighted thrills of being a child and getting lost in a scary book. *Under the Bed, Creeping* is noteworthy not only for its novel (that is, psychosocial, not psychosexual) psychoanalytic approach, but also for the remarkable amount of respect that it grants both the works it analyzes and the young readers who enjoy them. While Gothicism may not be the garden path of childhood that Dickens spoke of in "The Frauds on Fairies," it is nevertheless a very real avenue for children's personal development. While this path is a gloomy one, it is one that Howarth argues "all children should be allowed to explore on their own, for how can children appreciate the light if they have never played in the dark?" (9).

***Monsters and Monstrosity from the Fin de Siècle to the Millennium.* Edited by Sharla Hutchison and Rebecca A. Brown. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015. 260 pages, \$35.00). ISBN 978-0-7864-9506-1.**

Jeanette A. Laredo  
University of North Texas

In the introduction to *Monsters and Monstrosity from the Fin de Siècle to the Millennium* (2015), Sharla Hutchison and Rebecca A. Brown begin with a monstrous reworking of the first line of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813): "It is no longer a truth universally acknowledged by Gothic, horror, and fairy tale critics that a single monster in possession of immense hunger must solely represent transhistorical fears" (1). This collection of essays works to dismantle the assumption that monsters are monoliths that represent unchanging fears—such as vampires which symbolize the bloodsucking predations of an aristocratic upper class or werewolves that embody the dangers of man's primal urges. Far from being static, our monsters have changed along with our fears. The bodies of these monsters are "unbounded signifiers" for a host of "socio-historical, socio-political and socio-cultural anxieties" (1). Mixing new interpretations of Victorian classics like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* with readings of contemporary works such as *Child of God* (1973), *American Psycho* (1991), and the controversial *A Serbian Film* (2011), this collection challenges the reader to widen his or her critical definition of monstrosity and shines a light on the overlooked monsters that have stalked us in fiction and film for more than a century.

Hutchinson and Brown's adaption of the first line of Austen's novel gives a nod to the monster mashup *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2016) that perfectly encapsulates the current relationship between the monster and popular culture. The popularity of similar novels, like *Jane Slayre* (2010), *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (2009), and television shows, like *Hannibal* (2013) and *The Walking Dead* (2010), indicate that contemporary monsters are no longer outcasts: monsters are mainstream, cannibalizing their gothic roots and driving the mass consumption of popular culture. However, the popularity

of monsters and the critical attention they have received begs an appropriate question: "Why publish yet another study on monsters?" (3).

What makes *Monsters and Monstrosity from the Fin de Siècle to the Millennium* a unique contribution to the field of monster studies is how Hutchins and Browne define the critical and chronological scope of their study. Covering one hundred and fifty years, the range of this study shows the sheer number of new monstrosities that rose from the grave in a relatively short span of time.

From gods, serial killers, freaks, and human fungus, this study explores monstrous outliers that have been considered too weird or edgy for mainstream criticism. Two examples are the mythological god Pan and mushroom people. Mark De Cicco's essay examines what he terms the queer Gothic Pan's transformation in British literature from a pastoral figure into a monster that 'queers both the mythological monster and the conventions of the Gothic monster' (49). Because Pan inspires conflicting feelings of panic, desire, fear, and worship, he represents a queer force of the past that threatens to shatter the rational and industrial world of Victorian society. Unlike other monsters that appear during the end of the nineteenth century, Pan cannot be vanquished, and he is a precursor to the monsters that would appear in Weird fiction and horror films. Picking up on both these threads, Anthony Camara's essay analyzes Ishiro Honda's film *Matango* (1963), released in the United States as *Attack of the Mushroom People* (1963). Honda's film chronicles the moral and social degradation of a cross section of Japanese society into mycological monstrosities in a critique of the explosion of capitalism and decadence that eroded traditional Japanese values during the 1960s. Camara reveals that the film is a loose adaptation of William Hope Hodgson's fictional story "The Voice in the Night" (1907), in

which a sailor on board a ship at sea awakens to the sound of an inhuman voice in the darkness. The voice belongs to a man named John who, with his fiancé, became stranded on an island. A fungal growth soon took over their bodies and by the light of day the sailor sees a barely recognizable “John” who is more mushroom than man. According to Camara, this short story provided Honda with powerful images to represent the rapid changes in the Japanese social body that occurred after World War II.

In addition to bringing these marginalized monsters into the fold, the contributors to this volume also give classic monsters an interpretive facelift. This creates an uncanny experience for the reader as works that were once comfortably familiar become *unheimliche* through the lens of new interpretation. Emilie Taylor-Brown’s essay takes a familiar set of monster texts—Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897), and Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Parasite* (1894)—and asks us to read them against the emergence of the literary parasite in Victorian literature. These parasitic hybrids combine the characteristics of the social parasite, a harmless sycophant who gained access to the dinner table by flattering his or her host, and the biological parasite that thrives at the expense of its host organism. Within this context, the antagonists of *Dracula*, *The Beetle*, and *The Parasite* drain their victims while preying on larger fears of social degeneration at the end of the nineteenth century. In doing so, they enact reverse colonialism on the British Empire and turn Britain into an “Imperial parasite, parasitized” (13). In the same vein, Sharla Hutchinson’s essay on Marie Corelli’s gothic Egyptian romance *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* (1897) continues to explore Britain’s imperialist legacy as she reassess Corelli’s novel through the lens of New Woman fiction. In Corelli’s novel, Ziska and Araxes are a pair of ancient Egyptian lovers reincarnated at the turn of the century in Cairo. Araxes spurned Ziska, and she now seeks vengeance on her cruel paramour. Combining tropes of New Woman fiction with the *femme fatale*, Hutchinson argues that Corelli creates an ambivalently feminist monster whose unspeakable actions are sanctioned by a higher power and strike out at gender inequality.

What I find most refreshing is these studies’ definition of the monster as a violent, destructive, corporeal threat. Among the creatures in this book waiting to get their claws on you, readers will not find any “human” monsters. Forget the sparkly, misunderstood vampires of *Twilight* (2008) and the zombies who just want to cuddle in *Warm Bodies* (2013). The monsters in this collection all evoke the

non-normative monster body, affirming both Kelly Hurley and Noel Carol’s definitions of the monster body as “liminal” and “categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless” (4). Bodies in various states of moral and physical corruption—half-animal, half-fungus, oozing pus and other noxious fluids—threaten the social order and violate taboo. While there are monsters that appear human, they are only wearing human suits, among them Patrick Bateman of *American Psycho* (1991) and Lester Ballard from *Child of God* (1973), whose depraved acts of cannibalism and sexual sadism reveal their inner monstrosity.

The collection is structured in three parts that plot the inexorable encroachment of monsters into our social, private, and millennial spaces. The collection also reveals a gradual transition from texts that contain monstrous bodies and creatures to texts that become monsters themselves with the power to harm their audience. While I have always enjoyed the transgressive energy of the monster in fiction, part of that enjoyment came from the inevitable containment of the creature. The story’s heroes or heroines would banish the antagonistic fiend and all was well again. I could rest easy knowing that the horrors summoned by the author were safely trapped between the pages of the novel. Now the idea of text as monster has caused me to think twice before leaving a monstrous book unattended on my nightstand. In one of my favorite essays of the collection, L. Andrew Cooper analyzes this concept in relation to the controversial *A Serbian Film* (2011). Cooper argues “the movie is a monster to be contained; like many monsters, the movie hurts people, leading them into legal danger, self-harm, and troubled psyches” (207). His cogent analysis of a movie that violates our traditional modes of understanding reveals that perhaps “to get shocked into sense our minds need a good fucking now and then” (225).

This volume is a carnival sideshow that gives readers a new look at old monsters and introduces fresh curiosities, ultimately pushing the reader to think about monstrosity in new ways. From vampires who feed on xenophobic fears of reverse colonialism, to capitalist serial killers and vengeful haunted houses that refuse to be contained, this collection highlights how our monsters continually reflect our fears and ourselves. This collection is a valuable addition for any scholar interested in learning how monstrosity has evolved over the past one hundred and fifty years and where monsters are headed—just make sure to keep the lights on while you read it.

## List of Contributors

CHRISTINE MANGAN  
christinerosemangan@gmail.com

Christine Mangan will join the American University in Dubai as an Assistant Professor of English in Fall 2016. She recently received her PhD from University College Dublin, where her thesis focused on the critically neglected “Northanger ‘Horrid’ Novels”. Her research interests include: Gothic fiction gender and sexuality studies.

JUSTIN D. EDWARDS  
justin.edwards@surrey.ac.uk

Justin D. Edwards is Chair in Gothic Studies at the University of Stirling, UK. He is the author or co-author of several books, including *Grotesque* (2013) *Mobility at Large* (2012), *Postcolonial Literature* (2008), *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature* (2005), *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* (2003) and *Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature* (2001). He is also the editor or co editor of *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing* (2006), *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities* (2005), *Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations* (2010), *Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture: Pop Goth* (2012), *Technologies of the Gothic in Literature and Culture: Technogothics* (2015) and *Tropical Gothic in Literature and Culture: The Americas* (2016).

JENNIFER CAMDEN  
jcamden@uindy.edu

Jennifer Camden is an Associate Professor of English at University of Indianapolis. She is the author of *Secondary Heroines in Nineteenth-Century British and American Novels* (Ashgate/Routledge, 2010) and has published articles on Jane Austen, James Fenimore Cooper, and Ann Radcliffe.

JONATHAN NEWELL  
jonmdnewell@gmail.com

Jonathan Newell is a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia. His dissertation, tentatively titled “*The Daemonology of Unplumbed Space: Weird Fiction, Disgust, and the Aesthetics of the Unthinkable*,” considers the aesthetics of weird fiction, affect, and ontology. He has published articles in *Horror Studies* and *Science Fiction Studies* on horror fiction and the New Weird.

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