

THE CASE OF THE PSYCHIC DETECTIVE:

Progress, Professionalisation and the Occult in Psychic

Detective Fiction from the 1880s to the 1920s.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a little-known hybrid genre popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: psychic detective fiction. The stories that comprise this hybrid genre involve the rational investigation of supernatural phenomena. They have received relatively little critical attention due, in part, to their inability to fit comfortably in either the traditional “detective” or “ghost story” categories, in addition to the comparative obscurity of many of the writers. Typically, psychic detective narratives have been subsumed within the discourses of late Victorian “Gothic” criticism. Consequently they have been understood as manifestations of various forms of cultural anxiety because Gothic criticism is typically concerned with the transgression of boundaries and the anxieties associated with modernity. This thesis moves beyond the anxiety model of Gothic criticism by arguing that psychic detective fiction engages with ideas of progress, contemporary occult theories and the development of professionalisation at the turn of the century.

While anxiety was certainly one response to the uncertainty and rapid change that is generally understood as characterising the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so too was optimism, excitement regarding new possibilities and a fervent desire to bring about social improvement. In particular, this thesis focuses upon progressive ideas of social reform, collectivism, relativity, the synthesis of seemingly different “ways of knowing” and the possibilities offered by new fields of study such as the social sciences and psychical research. It is the sense of possibility, excitement, and faith in the ability to improve (both as individuals and as a society), that characterises psychic detective fiction. The detectives discussed are concerned with problem solving, attempting to bring about positive resolutions to supernatural problems, and providing assistance to those in need. In psychic detective fiction resolution and understanding is most often brought about through the merging of seemingly disparate elements and the transcending of binary oppositions, rather than the traditionally Gothic mode of reinstating former

boundaries and enforcing the separation or elimination of the threatening force. Psychic detectives are more concerned with forging new paths than recovering the *status quo*.

The engagement of psychic detective narratives with contemporary theories of Spiritualism, occultism and psychical research highlights the often progressive nature of these disciplines, and does more than simply fill a metaphysical void left by an increasing dissatisfaction with traditional Christianity. The ideals of individual discipline, self sacrifice, concern for the collective and the progress of human society espoused by contemporary occultism echo ideals promoted by the “new liberals” and socialists at the turn of the century. In addition, the increasing professionalisation of society, especially the emergence of social sciences such as anthropology and ethnology concerned with the exploration of social history, and the “helping professions” involved in the provision of welfare and psychological therapy, provide templates for the investigative practices employed by psychic detectives. Consequently this thesis also explores the differences between the amateur psychic detective and his professional counterpart.

This thesis is divided into three sections, each addressing one aspect of psychic detective fiction. Part One examines the tradition of Gothic criticism, the problems associated with understanding psychic detective fiction within this context and the history and development of the hybrid genre within the context of traditional detective fiction. It also discusses the emergence of psychical research, Spiritualism and the late nineteenth century fascination with occultism. Part Two examines specific psychic detective texts featuring amateur investigators. Each chapter explores a specific “site” (the home, the city and the countryside) highlighting the ways in which the supernatural pervaded *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century consciousness. The psychic detectives develop specific modes of interacting with each site, as hobbyists, *flâneurs*, folklorists and spiritual seekers, but in each case they demonstrate the progressive nature of their approach to, and interactions with, the supernatural. Part Three moves on to a discussion of later narratives featuring professional psychic detectives. It examines the synthesis between scientific and occult methodologies in professional researchers and the movement towards the integration of psychological and spiritual investigations of the self undertaken as a form of therapy by

psychic doctors. This thesis reveals a body of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century supernatural fiction that does not fit under the Gothic rubric. Moreover, through close analysis, this thesis argues that the distinctive feature of this hybrid genre is the way it takes up the progressive elements in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British culture.

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.
To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously
published or written by another person except where reference is made in the thesis itself.

Sage Leslie-McCarthy

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INTRODUCTION

PRESENTING THE PSYCHIC DETECTIVE

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries interest in the supernatural and the spiritual was both fashionable and far-reaching.¹ To a British public already fascinated by mesmerism, hypnotism and animal magnetism came the allure of the séance, the medium, and the ritualistic magician. This preoccupation with the occult and spiritual flowed over into the world of popular literature, where “weird tales”, “tales of terror”, or more simply “ghost stories”, were both popular and abundant.²

Novels such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) are widely read and discussed, but there are many other supernatural tales in short story format, readily suited to the burgeoning periodical industry, that vary a great deal both in form and in content. These have received relatively little critical attention. Vampires, werewolves and evil spirits, the staple character types from older tales, became prevalent in popular fiction, as did aspects of Greek and Roman mythical traditions. Closer to home Celtic fairy lore also underwent a revival. The traditional idea of the magus or magician took on a new focus under the influence of the popular spiritualist movement, with “magic”, in the sense of communion with the unseen and the production of inexplicable effects, becoming associated with the power of mediums and hermetic or kabbalistic ritual.³

¹ See for example Alison Winter. *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 and Roger Luckhurst. *The Invention of Telepathy*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

² Stories involving the supernatural do not form a unified group. In fact they can be divided into a number of sub-genres. This will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter.

³ The revival of interest in the Greek god Pan will be examined in Chapters Four and Five. Fairies were the topic of poems by Celtic revival writers such as W. B. Yeats and by Welsh mystic Arthur Machen, whose work will be examined in detail in Chapters Four and Five. The stories featuring mediums are too numerous to detail individually, but they usually fall into three distinct categories: stories in which a medium with genuine powers converts the protagonists to belief in Spiritualism; tales of the exposure of fraudulent mediums; and stories in which people come under the power of malicious mediums and must be rescued. Ritual magic performed by adepts and initiates is a common feature of tales involving professional psychic detectives and will be examined in Part Three.

Investigations into connections between late Victorian and Edwardian culture and these fictional texts tend to regard *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century literary explorations of the themes of magic and the supernatural as part of the evidence for a “Gothic Revival”, a continuation of the Gothic genre made so popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by such authors as Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, James Hogg and Mary Shelley⁴. They are primarily understood as embodying cultural anxiety as a response to modernity, the central preoccupation of Gothic criticism.

Gothic narratives in particular and popular fiction in general have received increasing attention since the 1960s within both Cultural Studies and Victorian Studies, and it seems, on the balance of evidence, that the most frequent use to which popular fiction is put is as primary evidence that a particular attitude or set of assumptions was in operation at a widespread cultural level. In other words reading and analysing popular fiction has been seen as a way of accessing and in some ways reconstructing the dominant ideologies of the culture in which it was produced. For example Scott McCracken in *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction* (1998) asserts that “written popular narratives can tell us much about who we are and about the society in which we live. ... [N]arratives read by large numbers of people are indicative of widespread hopes and fears” (1-2). Similar arguments as to the cultural value of popular fiction have been made by, among others, Christopher Pawling and Ken Gelder,⁵ with the result that while the divisions between Popular and Literary or High Cultural fictions remain, popular fiction is recognised as playing an important role within social discourse.

Within Victorian Studies, nineteenth-century popular fiction has been the subject of significant critical attention since the 1980s, with special focus upon mid-century

⁴ For a comprehensive survey and sourcebook of the Gothic period see Rictor Norton, ed. *Gothic Readings: The First Wave, 1764-1840*. London: Leicester UP, 2000.

⁵ See for example Ken Gelder. *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*. London: Routledge, 2004; Christopher Pawling, ed. *Popular Fiction and Social Change*. London: Macmillan Press, 1984; and Bob Ashley, ed. *Reading Popular Narrative: A Source Book*, London: Leicester UP, 1997.

Sensation fiction, women's novels and narratives of imperial adventure,⁶ as well as both detective and "Gothic" fiction. The organising principle behind many of these studies is generic classification. Specific popular texts are discussed as being examples of a genre, and thus it is the generic qualities and structures that are highlighted.⁷ This methodology is not a problem in and of itself, as popular fiction has always been closely associated with categories of genre and ideas of narrative formula, and it allows critics to focus in on the larger context of cultural significance rather than the peculiarities of individual texts. However in order for this approach to be significant there must be some kind of consensus that the texts have been categorised into an appropriate genre. This thesis will show how a problematic confluence of the theme of the supernatural with the genre of the gothic has resulted in a group of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts containing supernatural themes being misunderstood as simply "Gothic". This generic mis-shelving has resulted not only in missing a vital element in Victorian and Edwardian culture but also in the critical neglect of a significant supernatural hybrid genre, psychic detective fiction.

Essentially, psychic detective fiction involves the investigation of reportedly supernatural events by a character, or characters, who endeavour to understand the nature of the disturbances and facilitate possible solutions. The designation itself is something of a misnomer as it is not intended to imply that the characters are all "psychic" in the common usage sense of "mind readers" or having heightened mental powers, although some of them in fact do. The term, as it is used in this context, refers to a character who investigates psychic phenomena, the paranormal and the supernatural, regardless of the exact nature of the investigator's individual abilities.

⁶ See for example Joseph Bristow. *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*. London: HarperCollins, 1991; Pamela Gilbert, *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997; and Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore, eds. *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

⁷ That supernatural texts tend to be approached generically, specifically as examples of the Gothic genre, is evident not only within the criticism but in the very titles of the studies. See, for example, David Punter and Glennis Byron, "Victorian Gothic". *The Gothic*. Malden: Blackwell, 2004 and Fred Botting. "Gothic Returns in the 1890s." *Gothic*. London: Routledge, 1996.

The character of the psychic detective has undergone a major revival in the past decade, especially in the form of episodic television, but also in the cinema and popular novels. Modern popular culture is alive with manifestations of the psychic detective: FBI Agents Mulder and Scully on the *X-Files* (1993-2002), Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel on their respective eponymous shows (1997-2003 and 1999-2004), criminal profiler Frank Black on *Millennium* (1996-1999), and Sam and Dean Winchester on *Supernatural* (2005-), are some of the more popular small-screen examples. The psychic detective is also present in feature films such as the *Ghost Busters* movies (1984-1989), the *Exorcist* franchise (1973-2004), and *Constantine* (2005), and has popular literary manifestations such as Manly Wade Wellman's Professor John Thurnstone, Laurell K. Hamilton's investigator Anita Blake, Jim Butcher's freelance wizard Harry Dresden, and Tanya Huff's private investigator Vicki Nelson. All of the above involve a detective, or a group of them, who hunt down mysterious phenomena in an attempt to understand the powers at work and help those who may have been endangered by them. Some have psychic or supernatural powers of their own, others are believers looking for proof, scientific or otherwise, and still others aim to debunk the paranormal in their investigations. It is significant, given this resurgence in popularity of the psychic detective narrative, that few scholars have examined the history of this hybrid genre or investigated the many Victorian and Edwardian texts that helped create the figure of the psychic detective and its narrative trappings. One of the aims of this thesis is to address this critical neglect while at the same time offering an alternative way of approaching *fin de siècle* narratives of the supernatural than what I see as an "anxiety model" prevalent in Gothic criticism.⁸

Rethinking the Gothic Context

One reason for the critical neglect psychic detective fiction has suffered is its problematic relationship with Gothic criticism, which will be explored in Chapter One. If psychic detective narratives are understood generically as "Gothic" then they may be

⁸ The prevalence of this "anxiety model" will be discussed in detail in Chapter One.

seen as simply more of the same, their unique cultural and literary heritage being masked by the generalisations of Gothic criticism. If, as this thesis argues, Gothic criticism does not sufficiently account for some of the key aspects of psychic detective narratives, one of the ramifications of this is a distorted view of the cultural context that influenced the development of the hybrid genre. In particular, Gothic criticism privileges cultural anxiety over discourses of progress and modernity in readings of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts concerned with the supernatural. As Chapter One suggests, this anxiety-focused approach marginalises the significant late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual trends towards progressiveness and “mystical positivism”,⁹ contexts essential for the understanding the fusion of occult and scientific methodologies within psychic detective fiction.

To really understand the emergence and popularity of psychic detective narratives in Britain it is essential to recognise the period between the 1880s and the 1920s as a time of widespread cultural and intellectual dislocation, in which discourses of science, progress, and what it means to be “modern” were at the forefront of cultural consciousness. This approach to the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century, rather than one emphasising cultural anxiety, more readily accounts for the shifts that can be observed within the psychic detective sub-genre throughout this period.

The psychic detective texts examined in this thesis include a variety of features that position them as progressively modern in addition to merely anxious in tone. This is evident in their focus upon positive resolution, the merging of conceptual categories and methodologies, such as the combination of scientific and occult ways of knowing, to achieve new ways of understanding and improving their world, and a tone of inquisitiveness and curiosity coupled with an emphasis upon problem-solving. In addition there is a shift towards professionalism evident in the later texts, mirroring changes of that nature occurring in early twentieth-century British society. As discussed in detail in

⁹ The term is Terry Eagleton’s. See “The Flight to the Real.” *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*. Ed. Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Part Three, the professional ideal is one of the cornerstones of British modernity and is a significant aspect of later psychic detective fiction.

Unearthing the Psychic Detective

The very nature of psychic detective fiction as a hybrid genre, an amalgamation between detective fiction and the Victorian “tale of terror” or “macabre tale” also contributes to its elusiveness within critical literary discussions. Not really at home within either generic category, psychic detective fiction has remained disguised within the detritus of Gothic discourse, a fact compounded by the relative obscurity of many of the writers practicing in this subgenre. Though popular in their day, almost a century later the individual texts that form the bulk of the psychic detective corpus are mostly forgotten; they have been relegated to the literary backwater, seldom read and almost never published in new editions. This situation improved in 1998 when Ash-Tree Press (a small Canadian independent press established in 1994 with the aim of reprinting classic supernatural tales) began producing their Occult Detectives Library. Edited by Jack Adrian (pseudonym of the speculative fiction writer Christopher Lowder), five volumes have been produced so far covering the work of Alice and Claude Askew, Rose Champion de Crespigny, Dion Fortune, Harold Begbie and Kate and Hesketh Prichard (some of whom will be discussed in this thesis). In these editions many of the stories have been collected together for the first time, having never been printed in book form since their original publication in various periodicals.

Given the plethora of writers and journalists grinding out stories for the ever growing periodical trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is perhaps not surprising that these authors and their stories have slipped below the critical radar. What is surprising is that some of the more famous practitioners such as Bram Stoker, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood and William Hope Hodgson have also received very little critical attention for their psychic detective fiction. In the cases of Stoker, Doyle and Kipling, their more famous literary works (*Dracula*, the Sherlock Holmes stories and *Kim* for example) overshadow any

isolated contributions to the psychic detective genre. However there are so many examples spanning a large range of writers, formats and emphases that a study of the emergence and prevalence of psychic detective fiction is long overdue.

Very few critical studies examine this hybrid genre. In *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (1977) Julia Briggs devotes part of a chapter to what she calls “psychic doctors”. This is significant given the lack of notice typically afforded the psychic detective narrative, but she too fails to see anything significant about these tales, focusing instead on the cultural background of late nineteenth-century Spiritualism and concluding “perhaps on the whole writers were well advised to avoid such mumbo jumbo” (64). In the introduction to his anthology of psychic detective tales, *Dark Detectives: Adventures of the Supernatural Sleuths* (1999), Stephen Jones documents the 150 year history of psychic detective fiction, but like Briggs offers no critical context or evaluation of the tales, his introduction providing little more than a reading list.

However as the existence of the *Dark Detectives* anthology shows, critical neglect is offset by the continuing existence of a significant readership for these classic tales of the supernatural, a popularity which has spurred independent presses such as Ash-Tree to publish more accessible reprints. This readership for nineteenth-century supernatural fiction is largely based upon the popularity of the work of the American supernatural writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft, who acknowledged many of these earlier writers as inspirations for his own work. While Lovecraft is generally remembered for his fiction, especially the cycle of tales that form the Cthulu mythos, arguably his most impressive contribution to literature was a lengthy essay entitled “Supernatural Horror in Literature” composed in a cumulative fashion between 1924 and 1939. In this essay Lovecraft lists and analyses the works of writers he considers to have impacted upon the development of supernatural fiction. Among these Machen, Blackwood and Hodgson receive special mention. Avoiding the “Gothic” label, Lovecraft refers to works with supernatural themes as “weird tales”. This designation has been utilised by Lovecraft scholar S. T. Joshi in *The Weird Tale* (1990) and *The Evolution of the Weird Tale* (2004), which cover in greater depth the writers featured in Lovecraft’s earlier essay. In spite of his interest in

and acknowledgement of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers of supernatural stories, Joshi never mentions psychic detective fiction as a distinct genre, and his author-focused approach largely fails to consider the cultural context of the works themselves.

Given that these few references form the basis of psychic detective criticism it is not surprising that this hybrid genre has become lost beneath the over-arching cloak of “Gothic fiction”. It is only within Gothic criticism that we find any real engagement with the texts that this thesis refers to as psychic detective narratives. However, as the following chapter will demonstrate, Gothic criticism fails to recognise that there is a proliferation of these tales that in fact form a unique subset within late nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction. Reading these texts as strictly “Gothic” fails to recognise their progressive nature and the unique ways in which they engage with modernity. This thesis seeks to rectify this critical neglect, arguing that psychic detective fiction cannot be sufficiently understood within a Gothic framework. While psychic detective fiction does manifest specific cultural anxieties within late nineteenth and early twentieth-century culture such as shifting gender roles, urbanisation, the relationship between science and religion and the emergence of psychological discourses, these concerns are explored in more complex ways than the anxiety model of Gothic criticism suggests. *Fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century psychic detective narratives do more than highlight anxieties wrought by the complexities of modernity. They also reveal an alternative aspect of late Victorian and Edwardian culture: the emphasis upon progress, optimism, social reform and cultural evolution advocated by the socialists and radical liberals which was proliferated in popular discourses. The following chapters will explore a variety of psychic detective texts produced from the 1880s to the 1920s, examining the ways in which they highlight the dual responses to modernity in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British culture: anxiety and optimism. A discussion of the elements of progress, professionalism and the occult as manifested in psychic detective fiction demonstrates how these texts transcend the limitations of the Gothic anxiety model.

PART ONE

THE GAME'S AFOOT: ESTABLISHING THE CASE

CHAPTER ONE

DUBIOUS DESIGNATIONS AND GOTHIC MISDIRECTIONS

This chapter examines how, within the field of literary studies, discourses surrounding “the Gothic” and varieties of “Gothicism” have been largely responsible for constructing the ways in which we understand late nineteenth and early twentieth-century supernatural fictions. It argues that, while the prevalence and popularity of Gothic criticism has ensured that Victorian supernaturalism has received significant critical attention, it has resulted in a misreading of psychic detective texts within their cultural context.

Labelling a text “Gothic” imbues it with a set of assumptions that colour any subsequent reading. These are largely assumptions regarding notions of cultural anxiety, decay and degeneration, and this chapter will demonstrate how they have a tendency to oversimplify the often complex and progressive nature of certain late Victorian and Edwardian narratives concerned with the supernatural. In particular psychic detective fiction, with its mix of supernatural and investigative elements, sits poorly within the Gothic framework because Gothic criticism tends to either downplay or overlook the significance and prevalence of progressive discourses within *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century society and the impact such discourses had upon supernatural narratives.

In the late nineteenth-century supernatural texts, such as those by Bram Stoker, Rudyard Kipling, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, were not classified as “Gothic” but were referred to in far broader terms as simply “ghost stories” or “macabre tales”; designations more descriptive than analytical. However late twentieth-century literary criticism has re-categorised these texts, subsuming them under the Gothic umbrella. Specifically, such texts are commonly labelled as “Victorian Gothic”, “neo-Gothic”, or “nineteenth-century Gothic”.¹ As this

¹ See for example David Punter and Glennis Byron. “Victorian Gothic.” *The Gothic*. Malden: Blackwell, 2004; Manuel Aguirre. “On Victorian Horror.” *Gothic Horror: A Reader’s Guide from Poe to King and Beyond*. Ed. Clive Bloom. New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998, and Fred Botting. “Gothic Returns in the 1890s.” *Gothic*. London: Routledge, 1996.

chapter will demonstrate, this critical trend of equating texts with supernatural themes or characters with the Gothic genre is problematic, especially when it comes to psychic detective fiction.

The Emergence and Development of Gothic Criticism

The “Gothic” label was first critically applied to a set of popular texts in the 1920s when renewed interest in late eighteenth century romances resulted in the publication of Edith Birkhead’s *The Tale of Terror: A Study of Gothic Romance* (1921) and Eino Railo’s *The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism* (1927), which were followed by Montague Summers’ *The Gothic Quest* (1938). “Gothic” as a literary critical term denoting a specific literary *genre* was thus an early twentieth century construct, although, of course, the term itself had been in use in the English language since medieval times.² “Gothic” was thus established as a generic category, a subset of “Romance”, in which the key point of distinction was the atmosphere of terror or unease with which the Gothic tale was imbued. Broadly speaking, “Gothic” was taken to refer to a set of texts produced in Britain between 1790 and 1820 that came to be seen as sharing a set of ideological similarities. In particular, the Gothic takes up the Romantic notion of the Sublime, the aesthetic construct championed by Edmund Burke. The sublime can be defined as an “emotion of distress” found in “scenes that could evoke awe, astonishment, above all terror in the viewer” (Tropp 184). In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke argues that “when danger and pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight and are simply terrible; but at certain distances and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful” (Burke in Tropp 185). It is this vicarious “delight”, found in the experience of fictional danger, that the Gothic novels of the late eighteenth century sought to produce.

² For a history of the term “Gothic” see Montague Summers. *The Gothic Quest*. New York: Russel & Russell, 1964: 37-41, and Markman Ellis. *The History of Gothic Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP. 2000: 17-27.

Although critical opinions vary regarding the *minutiae* of criteria for inclusion in the genre, Victor Sage proposes a set of common attributes including:

the ‘authenticating’ pretence that the author is merely the editor of a found manuscript; the setting in medieval and ‘superstitious’ Southern Catholic Europe; the expectation of the supernatural; the conflation of hero and villain, the decay of primogeniture and of feudal and aristocratic rights in general, and the rise of an ambitious bourgeoisie eager to exercise individual freedom in marriage and inheritance; the focus on the victimised, but often defiant, position of women; the use of confined spaces – castles, dungeons, monasteries and prisons, to symbolise extreme emotional states. (in Mulvey-Roberts *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* 82)

In Sage’s elaboration of the generic components of Gothic fiction, the connections between specific social and cultural concerns (family structures, shifts in class status, gender roles) and popular fiction can be readily identified. However, as is the case with all literary periods and genres, late eighteenth century “Gothic” cannot be seen as a unified or programmatic whole. As James Watt argues in *Contesting the Gothic* (1999) “any categorization of the Gothic as a continuous tradition, with a generic significance, is unable to do justice to the diversity of the romances which are now accommodated under the ‘Gothic’ label, and liable to overlook the often antagonistic relations that existed between different works or writers” (1). Thus we see a tension between the idea of Gothic as a specific literary period and Gothic as a generic classification, a tension that inevitably facilitated the opening up of the category “Gothic” to new critical and theoretical approaches and texts written during later periods.

Throughout the twentieth-century Gothic fiction became a popular site of literary investigation: little known texts were unearthed and analysed, recurrent themes were traced through the works of contemporary writers and the production and reception of the novels were explored. There was a significant increase in interest in “Gothic” fiction in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the political and ideological directions inherent in feminist and Marxist criticism. In addition, by the 1960s, influenced by psychoanalytic criticism in literary and cultural studies, the term “Gothic” had shifted focus from a

specific literary period to a psychological condition in which any form of text (written, visual, aural) had a stake. This diversification of understandings of “Gothic” within theoretical discourses not only resulted in a proliferation of psychoanalytic studies of the Gothic³, but encouraged critical examinations of Gothic elements in a wide variety of literary texts and periods. In particular, as Nicholas Daly notes, “the linkage of Gothic to the unconscious has entailed the assumption that the business of Gothic fiction is to explore the taboo areas of a particular culture, and to express – and sometimes recontain – the anxieties and crises produced when the walls around these taboo areas begin to crumble” (*Modernism, Romance and the fin de siècle* 15). It is this relationship between cultural anxieties and Gothic fiction that has proven to be a dominant theme in Gothic criticism over the past twenty years, the departure point for the overwhelming majority of critical discussions of the late Victorian Gothic being the discourse of cultural anxiety and associated notions of decadence and degeneration.⁴ It has been assumed that Victorian and Edwardian cultural products were created within a climate of social, political and cultural anxieties and that the products themselves must inevitably bear the stamp of the climate in which they were forged. For example, Susan Navarette asserts: “*fin de siècle* horror literature ... is an expression of cultural anguish, because it is the vessel into which various authors poured their most corrosive anxieties and the darkest fantasies about the ‘true’ nature of reality” (*The Shape of Fear* 3). She argues that such texts “depend for their final effect on the degree to which they are able to generate anxiety” (5). Kelly Hurley agrees, arguing in *The Gothic Body* (1996) that the Gothic emerges “at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises” (5). Gothic criticism highlights the ways in which the forces that produce anxiety are, both consciously and unconsciously, re-

³ As an indication of the range of psychoanalytic approaches to Gothic criticism see Tzvetan Todorov. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973; Rosemary Jackson. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. New York: Methuen, 1981; and Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

⁴*Fin de Siècle* discourses of degeneration and cultural decadence have been the subject of many studies. See for example Edward J. Chamberlin, *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985; John Stokes, ed. *Fin de Siècle/ Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*. London: Macmillan, 1992; and Stephen Arata. *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

contained by these narratives. Transgressive forces are often overcome, contained, mitigated by the characters and “normality” or the *status quo* is maintained.

These associations between cultural anxiety and Gothic fictions fed into emerging discourses surrounding conceptions of the Female and Imperial⁵ Gothic which are concerned with the gendered and racial components of Gothic fictions. Not surprisingly the scholarship has emphasised *fin de siècle* anxieties about race, gender and class. In the final decades of the nineteenth-century the Victorians faced a number of challenges to their sense of identity and it is these identity crises that inform a large part of Victorian-Gothic literary criticism. Thus in the late nineteenth-century, just as in the late eighteenth century, the Gothic is perceived as a vehicle for expressing (and containing) cultural concerns and presenting the reading public with symbols for the ambiguity and dissolution of the familiar with which they were faced.

Glennis Byron, for example, argues in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography* that the “predominant bourgeois society, which, having prided itself on moral superiority, now faced challenges to traditional values and family structures upon which its much-vaunted superiority was based” (132). Many of these “traditional values” concerned the role and status of the British in relation to the rest of the world in general, and colonised races in particular. In *Gothic Images of Race in the Nineteenth-century* (1996) Howard Malchow applies postcolonial discourses to his readings of nineteenth-century “Gothic” texts, offering a variety of ways in which to read the “monster” as colonial or racial Other. Particularly

⁵ For discussions of the Female Gothic see for example Tamar Heller. *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992; Helen Hazen. *Endless Rapture: Rape, Romance, and the Female Imagination*. New York: Scribner, 1983; Helen Meyers. *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001; Kay Mussell. *Women's Gothic and Romantic Fiction: A Reference Guide*. Westport: Greenwood, 1981; John Franceschina, ed. *Sisters of Gore: Seven Gothic Melodramas by British Women, 1790-1843*. New York: Garland, 1997; Diane Long Hoeveler. *Gothic Feminism: the Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998; and Donna Heiland. *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction*. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. For ideas of the Imperial Gothic see Howard L. Malchow. *Gothic Images of Race in the Nineteenth-century*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996; Stephen Arata. *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996; and Andrew Smith and William Hughes, eds. *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

interesting is his reading of Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as a narrative of reverse colonisation and invasion-fear metaphor in which the foreign vampire relocates to England, subjugating the population by turning them into the Undead.⁶ In a similar vein, Patrick Brantlinger highlights in *Rule of Darkness* the connection between discourses of Otherness and notions of cultural degeneration and decline. British culture is seen decadent and in decline, endangered by the virile, healthy colonial subject. He argues that the Imperial Gothic provides:

insistent images of decline and fall or of civilisation turning into its opposite [...] ... Imperial Gothic expresses ... anxieties about the ease with which civilisation can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony. The atavistic descents into the primitive experienced by fictional characters seem often to be allegories of the larger regressive movement of civilisation. (229)

Underpinning Malchow's and Brantlinger's works and those of other postcolonial gothic scholars is the key assumption that late nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding issues of empire, race and national identity are sublimated into popular fiction and manifested as "Gothic" texts.

Similarly, sexuality and associated issues of disease and the body, common sites of *fin de siècle* anxiety, have also been the focus of much recent scholarship. Perhaps the most comprehensive work on the connection between these themes and 'Gothicism' is Kelly Hurley's *The Gothic Body* (1996).⁷ Hurley takes as the topic of her work "the ruination of the human subject" (3), and proceeds by outlining the various ways in which the body as an entity has been objectified, destabilised, reconstituted, morphed, and multiplied in Victorian fiction, becoming a symbol of dissolution and ambiguity. She

⁶See also Alexandra Warwick. "Vampires and the empire: fears and fictions in the 1890s." *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*. Ed. Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995; and Stephen Arata. "The Occidental Tourist: Stoker and Reverse Colonisation." *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

⁷See also David Punter. *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body, and the Law*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

uses the term “abhuman”, coined by novelist William Hope Hodgson, to refer to the “not quite human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other” (3-4). This “abhuman subject” is the focus of her work. Not surprisingly it is primarily the female body and the foreign body that become “abhuman” in what Hurley refers to as “British Gothic fiction” (3). She demonstrates that such texts emphasise the “thing-ness” of the female body, and the way that women are “defined by and trapped within their bodies, in contrast to the man, who is governed by rationality and capable of transcending the fact of his embodiment” (119). Hurley argues the inherent sexuality of the female form gives it connotations of corruption and immorality; the numerous fears and debates that surrounded both feminine sexuality and identity at this time making it a contested site. It is the female form that is therefore most frequently “Gothicised”, being formed and re-formed, depicted as contorting and fluctuating as it is “made to hold incompatible meanings” (122).

What emerges from within works such as Hurley’s is the focus in *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century Gothic criticism on notions of borders and classifications. Divisions between male and female, animal and human, corporeal and non-corporeal matter, and the ambiguity of these once-stable categories, frequently form the basis of fictional explorations: men become animals, animals act like men, and the idea of the evolutionary “throwback” is imbued with a very real sense of possibility. Thus Gothic critics such as Glennis Byron emphasise “the breaking down of boundaries, the dissolution of certainties” (132) in Gothic texts. As analyses such as Malchow’s and Hurley’s show, the Gothic preoccupation with border states and boundaries is generally seen as evidence of the anxiety surrounding cultural changes in the realms of, for example, science, sexuality, class divisions and race relationships. Similarly, the notion of “taboo” is discussed in this context. Regarding *Dracula*, one of the nineteenth-century texts most often read as Gothic, David Punter writes: “it is fair to say that its power derives from its dealings with taboo. Where taboo sets up certain bounding lines and divisions which enable society to function without disruption, *Dracula* blurs those lines” (262). In short, anxiety has become one of the primary nodes at which Gothic criticism tends to converge.

Another key focal point for discussions about anxieties in late nineteenth-century “Gothic” is the discourse of degeneration. This can be seen as part of a wider body of scholarship concerning the use of Darwinian theories as a thematic structure in a range of nineteenth-century literary texts, not just those containing supernatural elements.⁸ In the Gothic context, Byron asserts that:

the discourse of degeneration articulates much the same fears and anxieties as those traditionally found in the Gothic novel, and as concerns about national, social and psychic decay began to multiply in late Victorian Britain, so Gothic monstrosity reemerged with a force that had not been matched since the publication of the original Gothic at the previous *fin de siècle*. ... Such works as R. L. Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Arthur Machen’s *The Great God Pan* (1894), H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) and Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897) all draw their power from the fears and anxieties attendant upon degeneration, and the horror they explore is the horror prompted by the repeated spectacle of dissolution – the dissolution of the nation, of society, of the human subject itself. (132-133)

Focusing on “the issue of the relations between the human and the bestial” in *The Island of Dr Moreau*, one of the texts Byron singles out as concerned with degeneration, David Punter agrees that its power “springs largely from the attempt to deal with Darwinian revelations about the nature of evolution ... if evolution is a ladder, it may be possible to start moving *down* it” (244). This notion of de-evolution is usually thought of as central to the novellas of Arthur Machen, another author Byron mentions, who is the subject of two chapters of this thesis. Punter refers to Machen’s work as “the best in the rather sickly field of genre work which took up Darwinian anxieties as a basis for terror” (263). Similarly, the “protoplasmic reversion” that both Helen Vaughan in *The Great God Pan* and the young man in “The Novel of the White Powder” undergo, is understood by Susan Navarette as “a reverse ontogeny: an accelerated retrogression” (190), terms that highlight what is understood as the degenerative context.

⁸ See for example Gillian Beer. *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

As this brief overview of the dominant themes of Gothic criticism shows, cultural anxieties surrounding gender, race, and the scientific discourse of degeneration are the primary ways in which critics have engaged with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century fictions of the supernatural. What also becomes evident from a survey such as this is that Gothic critics consistently make reference to the same six texts they believe exemplify the centrality of the “cultural anxiety model”: analyses of Stoker’s *Dracula*, Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde*, Wells’s *The Island of Dr Moreau*, Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Marsh’s *The Beetle* and Machen’s *The Great God Pan* are the repeated focus of Gothic criticism.⁹ This begs the question whether these texts are in fact exemplary, and if arguments formed on the basis of reading these texts can usefully be applied to other narratives of the period concerned with the supernatural. All of the above texts are either full-length novels or novellas, whereas the majority of texts concerned with the supernatural that were published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took the form of short fiction. This is just one of the reasons why it is problematical to take these texts, and the Gothic “anxiety model” based upon readings of them, as a template for understanding *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century supernatural fiction as a whole. The remainder of this chapter argues that current Gothic criticism, while offering important insights, fails to account adequately for some of the key features of other supernatural narratives, particularly psychic detective fiction.

Modifying the Gothic Model

Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts concerned with supernatural themes have been subsumed beneath the “Gothic” banner, but the emphasis upon cultural anxieties that this generic classification suggests does not sufficiently account for many of the distinctive elements found in psychic detective fiction. Specifically, psychic detective fiction is intrinsically concerned with the possibilities of cultural and scientific progress and the role that occultism plays in this progressive world-view. In contrast to the

⁹ One of the exceptions to this is Kelly Hurley who, in *The Gothic Body* (1996), adds to her discussion of these canonical texts analyses of lesser-known novels such as William Hope Hodgson’s *The Boats of the “Glen Carrig”* (1907), Arthur Machen’s *The Three Impostors* (1895), Frank Aubrey’s *The Devil-Tree of El Dorado* (1896) and Bram Stoker’s *The Lair of the White Worm* (1903), though her particular focus does not include a sustained analysis of short fiction.

narrowness of the anxiety focus of Gothic literary criticism, social and cultural histories of the period have also stressed the importance of notions of progress and optimism, and have recognised the complex role that occultism played within this context.

The Ends of centuries have traditionally fascinated and terrified the imagination, for the sense of an ending and an irreversible but inexorable progression to the unknown ... have often conjured images of final decay and lingering death. ... While the demise of a century may encourage such apocalyptic visions, ideological collapses, and exhausted psyches, the human imagination also has the capacity to create images of renewal (based on the perception of nature's rebirth). At the end of the nineteenth-century, many intellectuals, having abandoned their religious faith but inspired by utopian dreams, envisioned a new age in the next century, convinced that the past – with its failures and disappointments – was a burden to be abandoned. (Beckson xi)

This emphasis on the dual nature of the period that Karl Beckson stresses in *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (1992) is mirrored in a number of studies.¹⁰ In *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (1994), for example, José Harris also emphasises the progressive nature of turn-of-the-century British culture:

British society was characterized by an immensely vigorous associational and reformist culture: by groups of people who constantly came together to improve, reform, rationalize, and revolutionize social institutions and bring them into harmony with the perceived requirements of the modern world. With a few noteworthy exceptions, the mainstream of writing on economics, sociology, and the analysis and treatment of social problems was optimistic, progressive, and ameliorative in tone. (36)

A number of elements contributed to the sense of optimism and faith in progress at the turn of the century and in the subsequent decades of the next. Technological and scientific progress, coupled with improvements in medicine combined to create a sense of “living in modern times”, especially amongst the middle classes. As Harris notes:

¹⁰ See for example the introduction to Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds. *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

[One] key theme of the period was a widely diffused sense of living in a peculiarly 'modern' age. ... [T]he consciousness of living in a new age, a new material context, and a form of society totally different from anything that had ever occurred before was by the turn of the century so widespread as to constitute a genuine and distinctive element in the mental culture of the period. (32)

Naturally the technological advancements that characterised the period (the telegraph, telephone and motor car), as well as more theoretical developments in the fields of physics and mathematics, also contributed to a belief in progress, modernity and a sense of optimism for the future.

This optimism was manifested in the many utopian treatises produced during the period such as W. H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age* (1887), Havelock Ellis's *The New Spirit* (1890) and H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905). Naturally visions of utopia differed, and under the influence of socialist ideals William Morris produced his utopian pastoral *News from Nowhere* in 1890. Societies such as the Fellowship of the New Life which later split into the Fabian Society debated questions of progress, the future, and social evolution, believing that "social reforms could be implemented through individual moral perfection" (Beckson 4). Influenced both by Positivist ideas and Idealist philosophy, many radical social reformers believed in the perfectibility of humans, which could complement doctrines of evolution introduced in the mid-nineteenth-century. The resultant optimism regarding ultimate human development can also be seen in the ideals of late Victorian liberalism, with its emphasis upon social and individual improvement. As Ian Bradley asserts in *The Optimists: Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism* (1980): "The twin ideas of progress and improvement lay at the heart of Victorian Liberalism. ... Liberals carried the general optimism of the period into a quasi-religious belief in the possibility of perfectibility in every sphere of life, including man himself" (43-44). The "new liberalism" of the closing decades of the century is characterised by Michael Freedman as "part of a general movement of progressive thought that had existed as an undercurrent in the first half of the nineteenth-century and gradually swelled to become a dominant factor in social thought towards the end of the Victorian era" (*The New Liberalism* 5). As an intellectual movement it is perhaps best

characterised as an “undogmatic and loose set of ideas, often described as a ‘spirit’ rather than a creed” (Freeden 5), emphasising concern with social welfare, cultural progress and the integration of knowledge forms.

As James Kloppenberg remarks in *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (1988), Leonard T. Hobhouse, a leading proponent of British progressivism, advocated the integration of “knowledge from both science and philosophy” (305) to achieve social and political reforms. Kloppenberg describes Hobhouse’s desire “to synthesize empirical science with idealist philosophy, liberal individualism with positivist collectivism” (306), emphasising his “vision of history as the gradual integration of knowledge and the incremental achievement of cooperation, not as part of an inevitable process, but as part of an ongoing project” (336). Freedden also characterises “the interdependence of the fields of human knowledge” as “a fact which is vital to understanding nineteenth-century English thought” (6), arguing that “the new liberals played a key role in moulding this very drive for a synthesis, for a general view of the human condition nourished by the united effort of the best that the various intellectual traditions could offer” (6). This interest in the compatibility of varying approaches and the integration of perspectives in solving social problems is one of the defining features of the psychic detective.

One of the key areas in which the “new liberalism” differs from mid-century “classical liberalism” is in a shift from an emphasis on strict individualism to a “conception of the individual as a social being whose values are shaped by personal choices and cultural conditions” (Kloppenberg 299). The embeddedness of the individual within his or her cultural context is one of the ideas implicit in Gothic criticism’s emphasis on cultural anxiety, but as discussions of progressive ideas show, the relationship between the individual and society can also result in a more highly developed social conscience and an emphasis on the provision of welfare and social services. Reba Soffer suggests that in the late nineteenth-century “despite a deteriorating ability to continue industrial ascendancy and the belief in progress sustained by technological success, there was confidence in the real possibility of individual and social

regeneration” (2). Proponents of progress “set out not merely to explain but to improve the individual and the society in which he lived” (2) and the new social sciences “pledged an accurate explanation of insistent problems and, still more important, their effective solution” (6). It is this dual aim of understanding and helping, rather than simply responding to anxiety, that motivates many of the psychic detectives discussed in the following chapters.

However, it is also important to understand that “progress” is not a simple concept and it manifests in a variety of different ways within the texts discussed in this thesis. Some stories engage with notions of welfare, altruism and the collective, while others are progressive on a more spiritual level, concerned with notions of natural regeneration and personal development. As we shall see, some of the narratives even contain elements that could be considered anti-progressive such as a veneration of various forms of primitiveness, anti-urbanisation, anti-science and a focus on the individual psyche. This is not surprising since not all of the authors of these stories were political progressives or liberals. However, notions of “progress” manifest on a variety of registers: political, social, religious and spiritual. It is this engagement with a range of approaches to progress that characterises psychic detective fiction as a genre.

The combination of faith in science (but not as sole purveyor of progress), intellectual optimism and the ideals of progressivism highlights a different aspect of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century culture and society from that presupposed by many Gothic theorists. This is not to say that fiction produced during this period was free from the taint of anxiety. On the contrary, as Gothic criticism has shown, it is both useful and productive to view late nineteenth and early twentieth-century supernatural themes in this light. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, psychic detective narratives sit poorly within this context. Consequently an alternative critical framework is needed.

One such alternative framework is suggested by Robert Mighall. In *Mapping History's Nightmares: A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* (1999) Mighall first

defines, then attempts to move away from the typical “anxiety model” of Gothic criticism which he attributes to critics such as Hurley and Arata.

The critics who contextualise the somatic and physiological Gothic of the nineteenth-century employ, to varying degrees, versions of what I will term the ‘anxiety model’ when approaching this question. By this I mean the tendency to imply that horror fiction from the end of the century offers an index to supposedly widespread and deeply felt ‘fears’ which troubled the middle classes at this time. ... The belief that the so-called *fin de siècle* witnessed a return of the Gothic appears to confirm what is now the axiomatic assumption that this period was ‘anxious’ and that this is reflected in horror fiction. (165)

The assumption that cultural ‘anxiety’ is reflected or articulated in horror fiction is somewhat tautological, and ignores important generic considerations. Horror, because of its generic obligation to *evoke* or *produce* fear is not the most reliable guide for indicating supposedly ‘widespread’ anxieties. Novelists, scientists, criminologists, and even polemicists have different professional and epistemological agendas and obligations. To subsume all utterances produced at a given time into a monolithic cultural ‘context’ suppresses these important differences. To read ‘science’ as a context for horror fiction in this way actually negates the epistemological status of scientific discourse, its function to produce a specific truth. Through such emphases, a fiction of monsters and supernatural threats is reduced to a covert articulation of ideology, while science appears to function principally as an arbiter or shaper of ‘fear’. (167)

In these passages Mighall questions Gothic criticism’s “axiomatic assumptions” about anxiety, especially those concerned with turn of the century science. As is the case with psychic detectives texts, the potential for readers to feel fear as a result of supernatural (or scientific) events is part of the stereotypical trappings of the genre, a consequence of the narrative formula not necessarily the author’s ideological perspective. It is possible to use supernatural themes to explore things other than anxiety, or for anxiety to be merely one aspect of a more complex situation.

In *Modernism, Romance and the fin de siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (1999) Nicholas Daly also focuses on alternatives to the anxiety model. While addressing many of the same texts as the Gothic critics, Daly eschews

Gothic nomenclature in favour of the term “Romance”, arguing that Dracula, the mummy, Dr Jekyll and Dr Moreau are “the iconic figures of the romance revival” (7). His approach is to understand popular texts such as these as “a sibling of modernism rather than as its unusually decrepit great uncle” the Gothic (10), arguing that, “the invention of a Gothic tradition has tended to short-circuit historical enquiry” (15) by conceiving of these texts in terms of the past or as a “revenant ... rather than as a new departure” (12). On the contrary, Daly argues that “[w]hile the phrase ‘revival of romance’ seems to suggest a return to earlier narrative forms, and a hankering after some lost literary world, ... the ‘revived’ romance was in fact a distinctively *modern* phenomenon, [that] was shaped in the same historical mould as literary modernism” (9).

While not advocating a re-categorisation as such, Roger Luckhurst expresses a desire to consider alternative approaches to Gothic narratives, rather than the popular emphasis on degeneration: “many authors associated with the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic – Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson, Richard Marsh, Arthur Machen, and Algernon Blackwood – produced texts saturated with possibilities lifted from psychical research, it becomes important to recover elements of the Gothic missed by the focus on degeneration” (*Invention of Telepathy* 185). This thesis builds upon these ideas and suggestions by Mighall, Daly and Luckhurst, investigating an alternative approach to supernatural narratives from this period, emphasising how psychic detective fiction embodies a particular response to modernity that is more “progressive” than “anxious”.

One of the ways in which the modern social context is revealed in psychic detective narratives is in the emphasis placed upon professionalisation and specialisation. In the context of social reform, Soffer argues that social issues were addressed through the “development of a professional class that was widely expected to deal with these complex social problems” (5). From a literary perspective, Nicholas Daly argues that:

the rise of an ethos of professionalism and expertise relates to the revival of romance in a very direct way. This connection shows up most clearly in the character repertoire of the romance, which not infrequently pits a team of men with particular skills – sometimes actual

professionals – against some outside threat[.] ... [T]he romance, insofar as it can be linked to a specific class or class fraction, embodies the fantasies of this emerging professional group, whose power is based on their access to and control of certain forms of knowledge. (8)

This thesis also takes up Daly's emphasis on professionalisation, demonstrating how many of the progressive features of psychic detective narratives are tied to the character's perception of their role in relation to the supernatural entity (as project, patient, or recipient of charity) and the investigative process.

The period between 1880s and the 1920s is widely understood as a period of change and transition in the realms of both culture and literature.¹¹ Although many of the key cultural anxieties remained pertinent during this period, the ways of addressing and coming to terms with these ongoing socio-cultural concerns also involved progressive ideals such as social exploration, the provision of welfare, and finding a "middle road" between what may, at first, seem irreconcilable "ways of knowing" such as science and the occult. In an effort to define the mood of intellectual inquiry at the turn of the century Terry Eagleton has argued that "what marks this whole dimension of the *fin de siècle* is a kind of mystical positivism".¹² What Eagleton means by "mystical positivism" is an amalgamation of scientific processes and methodologies with a sense of longing for the metaphysical. This "longing for the metaphysical" is tied to notions of religious crisis. It is something of a commonplace that in the latter half of the nineteenth-century a "crisis" of faith in traditional Christianity occurred, influenced in part by the development of the theories of evolution and biological determinism. However as Hynes argues, "Victorian science may have made metaphysics obsolete, but it had not destroyed men's metaphysical itch, and much of what one might generally call Edwardian science is concerned with the problem of restoring metaphysics to the human world" (134). This "metaphysical itch" is

¹¹ See Helmut E. Gerber. "The Nineties: Beginning, End, or Transition?" *Edwardians and Late Victorians*. Ed. Richard Ellmann. New York: Columbia UP, 1960; Samuel Hynes. *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968; and Karl Beckson. *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992.

¹² See Terry Eagleton. "The Flight to the Real" in Ledger and McCracken, *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*.

manifested in the late Victorian and Edwardian interest in psychical research, the study of supposedly paranormal or supernatural events using empirical, scientific methodologies, Spiritualism and occultism.

The relationship between science and religion in the late nineteenth-century, and more importantly for this study, between science and the occult, has been a popular subject of study since the 1990s.¹³ One way to understand this relationship is to emphasise the anxiety produced as a result of the rise of science at the expense of religion. For example, Susan Navarette suggests:

fin de siècle horror writers created an aesthetic that functioned as a response to and as a restatement of trends in contemporary scientific theory that, taken as a whole, permitted these aestheticians to advance the idea that a period of cultural decline was imminent both in England and on the Continent. (*The Shape of Fear* 3)

Navarette's focus on what these writers "understood to be the entropic, devolutionary, and degenerative forces prevailing within the natural world" (6) was generalised to include the cultural and spiritual worlds as well. This sense of decline is emphasised by Kelly Hurley who argues:

Whereas optimists might argue that evolution was synonymous with progress, ... the theory of entropy posited a cosmos indifferent to human aspiration, and degenerationism proposed that evolution was just as likely to move in a 'negative' direction as to progress 'forward'. More likely, in fact, since degeneration was the specific product of modernity; progress was the cause of its own undoing. (*Gothic Modernisms* 139)

Though this focus on degeneration is common in Gothic discourse, science in combination with the metaphysical can also be seen as suggesting progressive possibilities. For example, Fred Botting stresses that

¹³ See for example Roger Luckhurst. *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002; Alex Owen. *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004; and Pamela Thurschwell. *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.

the ambivalence towards scientific issues led, in the fiction of the period, to strange realignments of the relationship between science and religion, a relationship shaped by spiritualism and the continuing popularity of the ghost story. ... Supernatural occurrences ... are associated, in scientific and quasi-religious terms, with the forces and energies of a mysterious natural dimension beyond the crude limits of rationality and empiricism, exceeding the reductive and deterministic gaze of materialistic science. (*Gothic* 136)

In Roger Luckhurst's view, the occult is seen as taking on aspects of modern technology and scientific theory to explain the possibility of new forms of mental communication and spiritual abilities. He argues that

The advanced physical and electrical sciences resisted the reductive positivism of much degeneration theory. This suggests a number of resources running counter to degenerationism within the sciences. ... This is not to say that Gothic criticism has been incorrect in emphasizing the degenerationist paradigm, but it is to suggest that accounts of the late Victorian Gothic have become over-coherent, silencing some of the other forces traversing Gothic texts. (*The Invention of Telepathy* 185)

In general it is this perspective, rather than one of degeneration and decline that is picked up by psychic detective texts, eager to demonstrate the ways in which science and the occult can work together to offer new possibilities in modern times.

In addition to the relationship between science and the occult, psychic detective fiction deals with other seemingly oppositional categories such as masculine and feminine, public and private, urban and rural and professional and amateur. Though Gothic criticism also emphasises the role of boundaries and borderlines, unlike Gothic texts psychic detective fiction tends to portray such "binaries" as continuums rather than diametrical opposites, emphasising the positive outcomes that can result from a merging of approaches and categories. Though the tension between opposites can result in anxiety, psychic detective narratives aim to move beyond cultural anxiety through an emphasis on problem-solving, demonstrating how progress is facilitated by working through issues

rather than containing them. In short, the psychic detective is a proactive figure. Likewise, the relationship between understandings of the Gothic and progressivism is not a clearly delineated boundary. Identities and categories are complicated within individual characters and individual texts, but through this complex interplay of seemingly disparate elements, the positive aspects of transcending boundaries, rather than the anxiety associated with it, are often stressed in psychic detective fiction. It is this element, largely neglected in Gothic criticism, that this thesis explores.

In order to understand this position more fully, the next chapter will examine the emergence and shaping of the psychic detective narrative within its literary and cultural context before outlining the specific categories and varieties of psychic detective texts that will be explored in Parts Two and Three.

CHAPTER TWO
**THE FORMATION OF A HYBRID GENRE: PSYCHIC
DETECTIVE NARRATIVES**

Psychic detective narratives did not originate in the nineteenth-century: written tales of supernatural investigations have existed since ancient times. What is arguably the first written psychic detective narrative was recorded by Pliny the Younger in his *Letters* (circa 62CE – 113CE). In his letter Pliny tells the story of the philosopher Athenodorus who agrees to inhabit a reportedly haunted house in the hopes of meeting the ghostly inhabitant. He learns the ghost is disgruntled about his improper burial but, once the circumstances have been rectified by Athenodorus, he ceases to haunt the dwelling. This original psychic detective tale already contains many of the distinguishing features of later narratives: the haunted house, the brave and cunning investigator, the ghost who cannot rest until a feature of their former life has been put to rights, and the cessation of the haunting once the ghost's "problem" has been solved.

Although Pliny the Younger's letter may be the first written psychic detective tale, priests and priestesses, shamans, medicine men and witch doctors have been charged with performing exorcisms, psychic healings and placating fallen ancestors throughout known human history. The role of these figures is to understand and control that which is considered by the majority of the population to be outside the range of normal human experience. However, although the role of the supernatural investigator has been performed for centuries it wasn't until the late 1800s that the epithet "detective" could realistically be applied to either the people or the texts themselves.

Since the 1870s psychic detective fiction has become a popular hybrid genre, a cross-over or blending between two more common generic forms: supernatural fiction and detective fiction. The point of intersection between genres lies in the character of the psychic detective himself.¹ As this chapter demonstrates, the character type of the psychic

¹ The masculine pronoun is appropriate since until the early decades of the twentieth-century literary psychic detectives were uniformly male.

detective emerged at this specific time as a result of an intersection of a number of cultural and literary factors, in particular the growth of the Spiritualist movement, widespread interest in psychical research, and the popularity of the classic detective narrative.

The widespread popularity of detective and mystery fiction, and the sheer number of novels and short stories of this type produced from the latter half of the nineteenth century, contributed significantly towards establishing the figure of the “detective” within cultural consciousness. The modern detective story is generally understood to have begun with Edgar Allan Poe’s tales of the French amateur detective Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, which explore the detective method and the possible applications of ratiocination both within society and within fictional texts themselves. Poe’s method of pitting the brilliant yet eccentric amateur sleuth against the police professionals has become a staple ingredient of much later detective fiction, as has his tendency to bring the cases to life within a detailed atmosphere of specific places and times. In the latter half of the nineteenth-century Poe’s works inspired a number of imitators and encouraged many British writers to try their hand at the detective genre. Both Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins produced mystery stories in which detective work was a significant theme, as did the Irish author Sheridan Le Fanu and a number of popular women writers such as Mrs Henry Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon.²

While the authors mentioned above are perhaps more concerned with domestic themes and secular circumstances than the supernatural problems featured in psychic detective fiction, they are important in the emergence of this subgenre as they contributed to the popularity of the detective story in Britain, establishing the features of the genre

² For discussions of Poe as the originator of the modern detective narrative see Stephen Knight, “‘his rich ideality’ – Edgar Allan Poe’s Detective”. *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980; and Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok. *The Sign of Three : Dupin, Holmes, Pierce*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983. For further information on the detective themes prevalent in the works of both Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins see Julian Symons. “Dickens, Collins, Gaboriau: The Pattern Forms.” *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. For Sheridan Le Fanu and mid-Victorian female detective writers see Alma Elizabeth Murch. *The Development of the Detective Novel*. Westport: Greenwood, 1975:133–136, 152-158.

and forming a set of formulae which later writers could build upon and adapt. From the 1880s we see a firm groundwork for the figure of the psychic detective developing as the emphasis on the science of investigation developed along with notions of the scientist or medical man as detective. As Alma Murch explains,

The popular detective hero of the period was not only a brilliant analytical reasoner, but could also draw upon an almost inexhaustible fund of specialised technical knowledge about such matters as the varieties of tobacco ash, the principles of ballistics or the workings of machinery. Above all, he tended to become more and more of a 'scientist', seeing evidence in a test-tube or under the lens of a microscope. (165)

The psychic detective is a combination of a variety of detective "types" that emerged throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps the most notable of these "types" is the "gifted amateur" as embodied by Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous creation began his career in investigation in 1887 with the publication of *A Study in Scarlet*. Holmes brought the science of observation to new heights with his skills in tracking and in identifying traces of substances, and his ability to tell a great deal about a person simply by a cursory glance at their appearance. However Holmes also makes considerable use of the "hard sciences", especially chemistry, in solving his cases, highlighting the changing nature of police and detective work in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century.

Rational problem solvers such as Dupin and Holmes, with their focus upon empirical proof and physical evidence, reflect the nineteenth-century emphasis upon the role of science in determining truth as well as the emergence of crude forms of forensics in real-world policing. Naturally the popularity of texts such as these influenced the development of the character of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century psychic detective. The complex yet ephemeral nature of the events these characters investigated, along with the very nature of the psychic detective genre as a blend between the detective story and the supernatural narrative, resulted in a figure that embodied a combination

between the scientific detective and, as a result of the emergence of new psychological discourses, a detective who investigates the human mind (and soul).

In the years leading up to the First World War a new type of detective emerged, one who moved away from scientific hypothesis testing towards a more psychological approach, using an understanding of society and human nature rather than purely material means to understand and solve crimes. The best-known example of this type of investigator is G. K. Chesterton's popular detective Father Brown. The little Catholic priest with the soft voice, moon-shaped face and penetrating mind was the focus of 49 stories compiled in five volumes written between 1910 and 1935. Brown, along with his friend the reformed French thief Flambeau, solved crimes of various types with a combination of acute observation, clear, rational thinking and impeccable timing. While we are never sure of the precise particulars of how Father Brown reaches all his conclusions, it is arguably due to carefully looking where others do not, and more importantly, an astute knowledge of human nature and human sins acquired through years spent with penitents and the experiences of the confessional. His interest in crime is the possibility of redeeming the criminal rather than the thrill of the chase that excites Flambeau. Nevertheless Father Brown is, in his way, as effective a sleuth as Sherlock Holmes, without the need for the encyclopædic knowledge of the material world so essential to his Baker Street counterpart. The crimes Father Brown chooses to become involved in usually hinge upon human nature and human passions, and as such are especially suited to the experiences of the little priest.

The psychic detective can be seen as a combination of both of these detective "types": the rational, scientific problem solver and the psychologist. This thesis examines these "types" in discussing the development of the psychic detective as a character, but also makes an important distinction between the role of the amateur and the professional psychic detective in these narratives.

The growth of professionalisation in both the “hard” and social sciences towards the turn of the century³ had a significant impact upon detective fiction as a genre. In *Fictions of Loss* (1996) Stephen Arata suggests that:

a commitment to aggressive interpretation, to reading strongly against the grain in the service of hidden and ostensibly enabling truths, is common not only to the study of pathology but also to such recently consolidated hermeneutic practices as psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminology. ... What links together these and other disciplines is their status, newly won in this period, as professional discourses. (31)

The gradual professionalisation of nineteenth-century intellectual life, particularly from the 1890s onwards, is mirrored in a shift within detective fiction. In the early decades of the twentieth-century we see a movement away from the gifted amateurs like Dupin and Holmes, towards the more “professional” detectives, that is, those for whom solving crimes is more than a hobby. Although at first glance a priest such as Father Brown may not seem the embodiment of a professional “detective” in the same sense that policemen or a private detectives for hire can be understood as professionals, his professionalism lies not in his original calling but in the way he goes about his detective work. As Chapter Six will examine in greater detail, the professional ethos as conceived of at the end of the nineteenth-century, involved issues of dedication, training and hermeneutical approach, and in the context of detective fiction this shift towards professionalism can be seen in the movement towards increasingly more reliable practices and the methodologies of science and the social sciences, rather than the erratic, though arguably brilliant, intuitions of the amateurs.

This alignment of the figure of the detective with that of the scientist or social scientist (roles that had been particularly influenced by the trend towards the

³ See Stefan Collini. “Their Title to be Heard: Professionalization and its Discontents.” *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991: 199-250, and Eileen Yeo. “National Crisis and Professionalizing Social Science, 1850-1930.” *The Contest For Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class*. London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996: 209-245.

professionalisation of research), can also be understood through a shift in which the detective interacts with the world, his “text”. Arata writes:

The Victorian *fin de siècle* is the moment of full emergence for a figure I call the ‘professional reader’, the man ... whose training allows him to extract ‘useful’ meaning from a welter of often confusing signs. ... as the example of Freud and psychoanalysis shows clearly, this interest in close reading grows in part from a faith in interpretation as a form of therapy, a way of mastering troubles by coaxing meaningful pattern out of unruly experience. The classic detective story, as exemplified by Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories, also relies heavily on this faith. (4)

Although Arata mentions the Holmes stories as examples of the professionalisation of reading practices, detectives such as Holmes and Dupin do not exhibit some of the other key characteristics of the “professional” (such as some kind of formal training or study, or a notion of a “calling”) as they are understood in the context of this thesis. As a character Holmes is far more akin to the leisured gentlemen of Machen’s stories than the professional researchers discussed in Chapter Six, or the psychic doctors in Chapter Seven. The notion of “interpretation as therapy” can be seen in the character of the professional psychic detective, who embodies a mixture of the research scientist and the psychologist. As is arguably the case with mainstream detective fiction, one of the significant changes that can be traced in psychic detective fiction from the 1880s to the 1920s is the professionalisation of the detective.

This thesis builds upon this sense of transition within psychic detective fiction through its distinction between the amateur and the professional. As has been intimated, I am making the distinction between professional and amateur somewhat differently from the way in which the terms are commonly applied in discussions of detective fiction. Instead of considering all detectives without an official police or government status as “amateur” detectives, I propose within this thesis that an “amateur” is a detective who does not frequently engage in detective activities or does not consider it his primary occupation or “mission”. Thus those investigators who are intrigued by a special case or proposition and decide to investigate it specifically, and those who take an occasional

look at a haunted house for fun or interest's sake, will be referred to as amateur detectives in this context.

In the majority of late Victorian psychic detective tales, the investigative role is performed by an amateur detective, a man interested in understanding and solving the problem, but who does not undertake these kinds of investigations as a primary occupation. Many of these investigators act out of necessity, in order to protect themselves or their associates from the dangers posed by the entity. This circumstantial or reluctant hero was, and still is, a popular character type that has appeared in many fictional genres throughout literary history and was once again to fulfil a prominent role in Victorian supernatural fiction. In reality this type of amateur psychic detective is little different from their counterparts in adventure tales or romantic dramas, the only significant difference being that they are required to face a supernatural problem rather than cannibals or murderous ex-husbands. This being the case, the accidental psychic detective will not be investigated in any depth within this thesis.⁴ Instead Part Two will focus on other types of amateur psychic detective who can be found in late nineteenth century supernatural tales: the “hobbyist” in Chapter Three, the urban “*flâneur*” in Chapter Four, and the “folklorist” in Chapter Five. Following this, Part Three examines the professional psychic detective through discussions of the professional psychic researcher and the psychic doctor.

In addition to the popularity of detective fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the late Victorian and Edwardian preoccupations with the Spiritualist movements and psychical research also contributed to the development of the psychic detective subgenre. Although supernatural tales had circulated for centuries, the nature of

⁴ There is one other category of psychic detective that deserves mention, although it will not be discussed in this thesis: the “debunking detective”. This term refers to investigators who focus upon disproving supernatural occurrences within their particular cases, regardless of whether or not they themselves believe in various psychic or occult practices. Echoing the roles of many real-world paranormal investigators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the primary aim of these detectives is to demystify and rationalise supernatural phenomena. While this type of psychic detective can be seen in numerous one-off tales, it receives a sustained treatment in the series of tales by L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace, published in *Cassell's Family Magazine* in 1897, concerned with the investigations of John Bell “ghost-exposer”.

British society in this period, with its emphasis upon science and reason, altered the ways in which the supernatural was conceived. This “mystical positivism”, a mingling between the science and the occult, can be seen in a number of movements and societies popular at the time.

The practices of Spiritualism had fascinated British society since the 1840s but by the final decades of the nineteenth-century Spiritualist claims and practices had been placed under the scientific gaze. The medium, the Spiritualist and the magician were joined by a new breed of “supernaturalist”: the scientist. Scientific societies, such as the Society for Psychical Research, were formed with the aim of scientifically studying supernatural phenomena, and many Victorians, passionate about science and its possible applications, approached Spiritualism with a strong emphasis towards investigation, experimentation and the categorising of psychic and paranormal phenomena. Much has been written regarding the development of the Spiritualist movement in Britain, its influences and key personalities.⁵ However as the focus of this study is psychic detection rather than paranormal manifestations *per se*, it is the branches of the movement that were involved in *investigating* possible psychic and paranormal phenomena that will be concentrated on here, in order to show the relationship between the real-world investigators and their fictional counterparts.

The Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded in England in 1882, is perhaps the best-known body associated with the investigation of the paranormal, and is still active today. While it was not the first organisation to conduct inquiries into such matters (the Cambridge University Society for Psychical Investigation, better known as The Ghost Society, and the Oxford Phantasmalogical Society had both been formed ten years previously), it was the first to set about its research on a large scale, investigating a wide variety of phenomena with a scientific outlook.

⁵ For a detailed examination of the history of the Spiritualist movement in Britain see Janet Oppenheim. *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985; Joscelyn Godwin. *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994; or Alex Owen. *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

The aim of the society will be to approach these varied problems without prejudice or prepossession of any kind, and in the same spirit of exact and unimpassioned inquiry which has enabled Science to solve so many problems, once not less obscure nor less hotly debated. (from the 'Objects' of the Society, quoted in Gratton-Guinness 19)

In the early years of the Society's formation the primary phenomena under investigation were those associated with telepathy, hypnotism and a variety of spontaneous experiences, from hauntings to possessions, that were reported to Society members from all over Britain. In 1886 a two-volume text entitled *Phantasms of the Living* was published by the Society, containing detailed reports of 701 cases of spontaneous psychic experiences reported and investigated in Britain. In the 1890s attention shifted towards the investigation of mediumship, particularly the possibility of physical phenomena produced during séances, as well as correspondences from "beyond the veil". The investigation of physical phenomena such as ectoplasmic secretions and spirit manifestations remained a preoccupation of the society well into the twentieth century,⁶ and it is these more sensational possibilities that captured the imagination of many writers of supernatural fiction.

A number of famous figures, both independent operators and members of the Society itself, devoted much of their lives to the investigation and debunking of psychic and supernatural occurrences. The Cambridge philosopher and theologian Henry Sidgwick, first President of the Society, had been involved in psychic investigation as part of the Cambridge Society for Psychical Investigation at Trinity College and became the centre of what was later referred to as the "Sidgwick Group", a core group of active SPR members that also included the chemist William Crookes, classicist Frederick Myers, future Prime Minister Arthur Balfour and his sisters Eleanor and Evelyn. The prominent Victorian physicist and radiation specialist Sir Oliver Lodge also dedicated much of his time to psychical research.⁷

⁶ The SPR published a journal of its Proceedings starting in 1884, and the collected volumes of this journal provide a wealth of information regarding details of the experiments, cases and individuals involved in the Society's investigations each year.

⁷ See for example Alan Gauld. *The Founders of Psychical Research*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

Although a more detailed examination of these fascinating figures lies outside the scope of this discussion, a brief reference to the specific work undertaken by William Crookes serves to show the manner in which Victorian scientists interested in psychical research adapted methodologies from the hard sciences to fit their more esoteric interests. Crookes, famous for having discovered the element Thallium in 1861, became interested in the investigation of Spiritualist phenomena in the 1870s claiming, “I consider it the duty of scientific men who have learnt exact modes of working to examine phenomena which attract the attention of the public, in order to confirm their genuineness or to explain, if possible, the delusions of the dishonest and to expose the tricks of deceivers” (Crookes in Inglis 253). Initially interested in debunking false mediums and seeking to quantify any phenomena produced, Crookes designed apparatus to measure these phenomena as well as organising experimental conditions under which he believed reliable measurements could be taken. He was able to convince fellow scientists such as Francis Galton to witness a number of his experiments, and Galton subsequently praised Crookes’s work in a series of letters to his cousin Charles Darwin (Inglis 258-9). Although his experiments proved time and again the difficulties inherent in any attempt to quantitatively examine such occurrences, his approach to his research and the empiricism he strove towards influenced many future psychic investigators.

It was not only scientists who were attracted to psychical research. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many prominent political, literary and intellectual figures became associated with the cause. Writers such Alfred Lord Tennyson, Lewis Carroll, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Aldous Huxley were all members of the SPR along with John Ruskin, Henri Bergson and Ferdinand Schiller. On the continent, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung also explored psychic issues. The diversity of fields and nationalities represented by this list demonstrates the extent to which intellectuals of various fields were concerned with the issue of psychical research and the inevitability that this interest would be transmitted to the wider reading public. This profound fascination with adapting the methodologies and assumptions of science in order to investigate supernatural and paranormal phenomena

was captured in the popular fiction of the time, as is manifested by the psychic detective genre.

The remainder of this thesis will be divided into two Parts. Part Two, *The Chill of the Chase: The Amateur Psychic Detectives*, explores amateur psychic detectives at work in three sites: the home, the city and the countryside, taking on the roles of hobbyists, *flâneurs* and folklorists respectively. The focus on these particular sites, those that contemporary audiences were most familiar with, demonstrates the range of psychic detective narratives, showing how supernatural themes had permeated many aspects of life. Additionally, this division aids the exploration of the progressive themes of psychic detective fiction by revealing the various ways progressive ideas pervaded these sites of modern life. The amateur psychic detectives in these chapters differ from the professionals in both the degree of their interest and training and the extent of their experience. Nevertheless, for each site the investigators have developed specialised ways of interacting with their environments and working with the supernatural phenomena they come into contact with, mirroring the trend towards increased specialisation in the modern workforce.

Part Three, *Tales From the Consulting Room: The Professional Psychic Detectives*, moves on to an examination of the professional psychic detectives prevalent after the turn of the century. The professionals are defined by their training, experience and sense of vocation and can be divided into two groups: the researchers and the psychic doctors. Though both groups are involved in fieldwork, the researchers in Chapter 6 tend to focus on supernatural entities inhabiting “places”, whereas the “site” that the psychic doctors explore in Chapter Seven is internal in nature, reflecting the focus on the nature of the “self” in contemporary psychological discourse.

The variety of supernatural manifestations, sites of investigation, and types of detectives explored throughout Parts Two and Three offers a reasonably comprehensive survey of a neglected hybrid genre. By demonstrating the ways in which these texts move beyond the traditional Gothic focus upon cultural anxiety to explore progressive ideas

and the possibilities of modern life, this thesis provides an alternative approach to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century interest in supernatural narratives and possibilities that takes into consideration the variety of responses to modernity popular at the time.

PART TWO

THE CHILL OF THE CHASE: AMATUER PSYCHIC

DETECTIVES

CHAPTER THREE

A HAUNTED HOBBY

This chapter examines the role of the amateur psychic detective as a hobbyist in the investigation of haunted houses, and focuses on what is perhaps the most popular and well-known of all supernatural entities: the ghost. The difference between these *fin de siècle* psychic detectives and their counterparts earlier in the century becomes clear through an investigation of their arguably more progressively minded approaches and methods.

More than a century after its inception, the Victorian ghost story remains, in both popular and critical discourses, the hallmark of nineteenth-century supernatural fiction. Though the ghost story is as varied in form and content as any other literary genre, it is traditionally seen as having a pedigree that can be traced from the classical ghost stories of antiquity (such as that of Pliny the Younger in the previous chapter and Homer's depictions of the shades in Hades), through the mystery plays of the Middle Ages and the spectres of Shakespeare, to the now famous ghosts of the Gothic novels. In spite of the ghost story's literary lineage, the genre has undergone significant changes since its inception in mythology, and by the nineteenth-century ghosts and their antics had become more popular, more prevalent and, perhaps paradoxically, more difficult to identify than ever before. It is difficult to provide an accurate definition or even description of the nineteenth-century ghost story, since the only real connection many of the tales share is a sense of the spectral, or haunted. Many tales commonly referred to as "ghost stories" contain no actual ghost, in the traditional sense of a returned human spirit, or even a definite haunted space. People, objects, vehicles, roads, clothing, trees, rocks, animals and even patches of air are haunted in Victorian ghost stories, and the manner of the haunting can span the full range of the senses: supernatural manifestations are seen, heard, felt, smelt and tasted as well as posited, dreamed, imagined, supposed, contested and questioned.

Given this plethora of ghostly variations, late nineteenth and early twentieth century authors were free to explore a limitless variety of social, personal and religious issues and most short-fiction writers of the nineteenth-century attempted at least a few stories in this vein. In an effort to categorise the mass of ghost stories produced throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Dorothy Scarborough, writing in 1917, arranges the tales according to the motive of the ghost. She proposes four types of “ghost” or ghostly “functions” that frequently appear in ghost stories throughout history: request, revenge, warning and revelation. Scarborough then proceeds to problematise these categories by suggesting that nineteenth-century ghosts may share these motives but differ in “type” to their literary predecessors in that the “modern” ghost can be subjective or objective, that is, seen by all or by only a select few, or may manifest as a double, thus being the “ghost” of someone who technically isn’t dead. Another significant change she notes between the modern ghost and its immediate predecessors in the Gothic novel is the “muscular supernaturalism” of the contemporary spook (a play on the “Muscular Christianity” espoused by Charles Kingsley), in which the ghost kills or injures with its own hands. Lastly, Scarborough also highlights the freedom of the modern ghost to manifest where and when it chooses, appearing as it likes. No longer are ghosts restricted to haunting vaults and castles wearing shrouds or flowing gowns; much like the New Woman the modern ghost is an independent entity. It is this independent, complex and self-aware ghost that is most commonly encountered in late nineteenth-century psychic detective fiction.

There is, of course, more than one way to classify ghostly manifestations, as the records from the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) attest. Motive may be particularly significant in narrative terms, but location and the paranormal “experience” are also essential components, especially for psychical researchers seeking to understand and document such phenomena. Instead of focussing on the ghost’s own history, as many stories written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries do, later ghost stories, no doubt influenced psychical research, focussed on the subjective experiences of ghost-seers. The relationship between fiction and reality in the nineteenth-century ghost story is particularly fraught, especially when it comes to narratives of psychic investigation.

Writers of fictional ghost stories could hardly avoid being influenced by real-world investigations. As Scarborough writes, “The activities of the Society for Psychical research have had decided effect in stimulating ghostly stories. . . . The proceedings of the association have been so widely advertised and so open to the public that persons who would not otherwise give thought to the supernatural have considered the matter” (75). The relationship between reality and fiction is further complicated when one considers the numerous frauds and hoaxes perpetrated upon psychical researchers, and the number of fictional ghost stories actually purporting to be “real”. Nevertheless, the reading public devoured the reports of the SPR just as voraciously as the fictional stories that filled the pages of popular periodicals, and through this association of real-world psychical research with fictional narrative, the character of the amateur psychic detective emerged, based on the activities of corresponding figures in the real-world.

Throughout the nineteenth-century many stories were produced in which people investigate ghostly presences, but most of these feature the “accidental hero” type noted in the previous chapter. In order to move forward into a discussion of a particular form of amateur psychic detective - the hobbyist - this chapter will examine a very specific variety of ghost story: the haunted house narrative. Specifically it will discuss texts where, as was the case with the SPR, a haunting is investigated by an amateur psychic detective whose special interest or “hobby” is investigating such occurrences. A variety of texts will be discussed, but primary analysis will centre upon Margaret Oliphant’s “The Open Door” (1881), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Brown Hand” (1899), and Rudyard Kipling’s long short-story “The House Surgeon” (1909).

The reason for choosing the “haunted house” format over the numerous other varieties of ghostly narrative is twofold. Firstly, it is the form of the archetypal ghost story and the type of haunting that was most frequently discussed in contemporary psychical research circles. Secondly, critics have also tended to focus on the home as a site of anxiety in gothic narrative, and although this is one aspect of the haunted house narrative, an investigation of the role of psychic detectives in such texts highlights the ways in which the trope of the haunted house can also be seen as a comment upon

modern urban life and an indication that, in fact, the delineation between private and public spaces had well and truly begun to break down by the turn of the century. In these stories it is the psychic detective who acts as a bridge between “private” and “public”. His task is to uncover the truth behind the domestic disturbance, and in some cases act as a mediator between the past and the present as well as between inside and outside the domestic space. Although Gothic criticism also emphasises the breaking down of boundaries, in psychic detective fiction the transcending of boundaries signals a way of moving forward and facilitating positive resolution rather than simply producing anxiety. Resolution in these texts involves the merging of opposites rather than their re-containment.

The notion of an “outsider” or “intruder” is particularly interesting in this context as the epithet could just as easily be applied to the detective as the ghost. Ghosts are understood as intruding on the peace of the living, just as the detective is intruding into private affairs, yet the reverse is also possible. New families, unconnected with the ghost can also be read as intruding on the spirit’s territory, and the detective, traditionally an outsider figure, must in effect become an insider in the ghost’s world in order to understand the situation and rectify it if possible. In addition, the detective is almost always invited into the home, a fact that mitigates his status as an intruder. Ghosts, on the other hand, are seldom welcomed and rarely invited into the domestic space; their presence is almost always seen as an intrusion.

In the later texts examined in this chapter, the male detective, while engaging in his investigative “work” is also becoming entrenched in the domestic space and performing the role of family mediator, a traditionally feminine role. By blurring the boundaries between private and public spaces the detective is also merging gender roles. Gothic criticism has had a good deal to say about the anxiety caused by the possible blurring of gender roles and identities,¹ but in the case of psychic detective fiction this action results in what may be a surprising consequence: in these stories it is only through

¹ See for example Kelly Hurley. *The Gothic Body* (1996).

this merging of spheres and roles that a haunting is actually resolved to the benefit of both the people and the supernatural entity.

This chapter will examine a number of haunted house narratives, paying particular attention to the issue of resolution. There are two ways in which narratives of haunted houses typically conclude. Either the protagonists escape and recommend the house be destroyed, or the reason for the haunting is established and rectified so the house can once again be safely inhabited. This latter form of resolution, arguably the most positive outcome, is more often achieved in later psychic detective texts than those in which the protagonist is an accidental hero or a man out to prove his bravery. The reason for this is that psychic detectives typically mediate between ideological spaces and gender roles to affect a satisfactory outcome. These psychic detectives embody the progressive spirit of their times through their focus on providing assistance to troubled families and individuals, offering hope for a more positive future. The selflessness of the psychic detective is a reflection of liberal attitudes towards, for example, the provision of welfare, with the lost spirit in these narratives taking on the role of the poor or disadvantaged citizen. The reader is positioned in such a way as to feel sympathy for the ghost rather than fear. The nature of the resolution of the hauntings therefore results in a more positive future for all parties rather than the production and subsequent re-containment of anxiety, which is the focus of more traditional, Gothic understandings of the haunted house.

For the Victorians, the home represented safety, family, and domesticity. It was a feminised space, a sphere in which women had a feeling of power, although in reality this power was somewhat circumscribed. The home was the site of the familiar in which people and objects were acquired, arranged and maintained with the aim of producing the right effect.² Narratives of haunted houses upset this domestic idyll. They seek to destabilise the familiar and comfortable setting of the home and transform it into something sinister and Other. Freud explains the anxiety that this causes through the

² For more detailed accounts of middle class domesticity in the nineteenth-century see Steven Mintz. *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture*. New York: New York UP, 1983; Jane Lewis. ed. *Labour & Love: Women's Experience of Home and family 1850-1940*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986; and Jenni Calder. *The Victorian Home*. London: Batsford, 1977.

notion of the *unheimlich* which, when translated into English, becomes “uncanny”. However, since the German word for home is *heim* the English translation fails to elucidate the strong connection between the concept of “home” and notions of the uncanny. Home is safe and familiar, and feelings of uncanniness are produced when the home is defamiliarised.

This subversion of the domestic was not new to *fin de siècle* literature. It was a significant theme in the late eighteenth century Gothic novel,³ and later in the Sensation novel of the 1860s,⁴ for example in the work of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. In these texts, occurrences of domestic violence, child abuse, homelessness and female criminals subvert the notion of home as a safe space. In the haunted house narrative of the late nineteenth-century, domestic anxiety manifests through the theme of invasion. However, in these texts the role of the psychic detective is not just to restore and reclaim the space, removing the anxiety by returning command of the contested space to the family. The psychic detective offers a solution that allows both the family and the haunting spirit to find peace, promising a brighter future for all parties. The detective facilitates progress, and a more positive approach to the modern world, through mediation and integration.

By the *fin de siècle*, changing ideas regarding sexuality, marriage, female suffrage and gender roles had begun to problematise traditional notions of domesticity, particularly the separation of the feminine, private sphere of home and family from the masculine sphere of work and public life. Particularly relevant to discussions of the haunted house narrative are changes to the way middle class domestic space was constructed and conceived in late nineteenth-century Britain. In *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-century Paris and London* (1999) Sharon Marcus explores the ways in which the ideals of separate spheres and the sacredness of domestic space were

³ See Kate Ferguson Ellis. *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

⁴ For more information on this theme in the Sensation novel see Elaine Showalter. “Family Secrets and Domestic Subversion: Rebellion in the Novels of the 1860s.” *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses*. Ed. Anthony S. Wohl. London: Croon Helm, 1978.

undermined by trends in modern housing, stressing the impermanence of new housing developments and the transience of occupation. Although the home was idealised as an “embodiment of a persistent, unchanging version of the past that could be transmitted to future generations” (92), as families moved more often or rented newly-built homes, this ideal was subsumed and a house was no longer a site inhabited by one family for generations, the modern situation resulting in “tenants and houses lacking the permanence crucial to the domestic ideal” (111). She suggests that “the discrepancy between domestic ideology and the dwelling practices of Londoners came to be inscribed within the literary subgenre of the haunted-house story” (88). Stories of haunted houses can thus be seen as a way of engaging with modernity, coming to terms with the lack of privacy and the noise that were an unavoidable part of many modern domestic spaces. Though Marcus’s study is concerned with London specifically, these trends were arguably widespread, as is evidenced by the number of families depicted renting housing, not just in the capital but also in other cities and rural areas. Even those families fortunate enough to possess hereditary country estates often did not inhabit them, offering them for long-term leases or renting them by the season.

Modern housing trends also impacted on the role and import of the ghost itself. Marcus calls attention to the fact that

[t]he Gothic ghost had some conscience about whom he haunted. He had too much reserve to force himself needlessly upon those that had no connection with his past. If he knew someone that deserved punishment for wrong done him or his, he tried to haunt him and let others alone. The modern ghost is not so considerate. (116)

In the late nineteenth-century haunted house narrative one of the most common tropes is the family who rents a property only to discover that one of the previous occupiers has left something behind, a ghost of their former presence. The ghost is therefore doubly “intrusive” for them. In addition to the sense of something alien invading their domestic space, there is also the fact that the ghost is truly a stranger, a remnant of previous inhabitants that the new family has no connection with. Enter the psychic detective, whose task becomes the mediation between the past and the present, the old and the new.

In spite of the existence of psychic investigators in haunted house narratives since the 1850s it is not until the 1880s that this movement towards mediation and reconciliation really takes place. As an examination of a range of haunted house narratives shows, a possible reason for this shift is a change in the motivation of the investigators. In the earlier texts the detectives seem to have something to prove. The narratives stress the bravery, courage and resilience of the man (and it is always a man) who opts to spend time in the haunted residence. His motivation for doing so is usually stated as curiosity or a desire to prove that the house poses no danger to the person who approaches it without fear. In reality, the protagonist must battle against the fear he is ironically afraid of admitting to, in order to survive the ordeal. The haunted house narrative is therefore akin to the common literary trope of the descent into the underworld, through which the protagonist is tested and learns something about himself. The investigator feels he has something to prove, either to himself or to those interested in the outcome of his ordeal. Often a protagonist is “dared” to undertake the task or offered a monetary reward which must be earned. Though they undertake the investigation of their own free will and as a result of their curiosity and desire to prove a point, these amateur psychic detectives are usually more concerned with themselves, their own safety and reactions, than actually providing a solution to the haunting. To them the haunted domestic space is one in which a man may prove his worth, and he does this by excluding anything “feminine”, such as fear, from his purview. In addition, the very domesticity of these spaces is called into question by the fact that the houses investigated are very seldom currently inhabited.⁵

A clear demonstration of this characterisation in action is Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s “The House and the Brain” (also known as “The Haunters and the Haunted”) (1859), the story of an unnamed man (the narrator) who undertakes to investigate a

⁵ This is often emphasised by the titles of the stories. See, for example, J. H. Riddell’s *The Uninhabited House* (1875).

reportedly haunted house “in the midst of London” (9), though since the house had first been offered as lodgings, no one had been able to remain in it for more than three nights. His motivation is simply curiosity. He is excited at the prospect and stresses bravery as his primary qualification for investigating the haunting, claiming “my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them – even in a haunted house” (13). From the beginning of the story, the reader is encouraged to regard the undertaking as some kind of test. The challenge of remaining in the house longer than any previous occupant is established at the outset, and the narrator, makes it clear that pride is at stake: “if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen” (14). That their pride is constructed as both masculine and national, based on bravery, staying power, and a willingness to challenge all comers (even a “dozen” of them) establishes the undertaking as something akin to a sporting match or a military engagement. As his chambers are subsequently invaded by a variety of ghostly manifestations, the narrator is consumed with horror, but steadfastly refuses to admit to being frightened. He survives the night (unlike his dog whose neck is broken by the spirits), refusing to leave the house “till it was broad daylight” (28). Visiting the owner, the narrator persuades him that the source of the problem is a small room adjoining the chambers he and his servant had occupied (exactly how he deduces this is not particularly clear), and that the destruction of this room will prevent any further supernatural activity.

This early psychic detective text demonstrates three things common to many mid-century haunted house narratives: the importance placed upon masculine qualities of bravery and self-control, the haunted house as a site at which a man may test his qualities, and the use of destruction as a form of resolution. However, sometimes instead of the destruction of the offending property, the narrative ends with the death of the investigator. In Rhoda Broughton’s “The Truth, The Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth” (1868) Ralph Gordon, a young member of the hussars, begs to be allowed to spend the night in the haunted room: “Let me come here tonight and sleep in that room; *do*, Mrs Montresor ... with the gas lit and a poker, I’ll engage to exorcise every demon

that shows his ugly nose. ... [I]t would take more than a whole squadron of departed ones, with the old gentleman at their head, to send me crazy” (81). Again the military aspects of the task are stressed, the soldier constructing his ordeal as a war-game headed by the devil. In spite of his bravado, Gordon dies in his attempt, and the story ends with the reader and the family still none the wiser as to the true nature of the supernatural disturbance.

These two forms of resolution, the destruction of the property or the death of the investigator, along with a third option where the protagonist survives his ordeal and the house, proven dangerous, is simply left alone, are by far the most common types of closure offered in pre-1880s haunted house narratives. In fact, this seems to hold true for both the stories of accidental heroes and amateur investigators alike. This is perhaps a result of the fact that the haunted house itself is often seen as less important to the narrative than the experience of the individual and their agenda in undertaking the investigation, usually a matter of pride or a desire to test or prove themselves. Since the investigator is frequently a young, unmarried man, the ordeal of the haunted house can also be understood as a rite of passage into manhood in which the candidate must prove he possesses the necessary masculine qualities of courage, honour and clear thinking. The protagonist is seldom invited into the house; either there are no (living) inhabitants to issue the invitation, or the investigator instigates the experience himself, using the site for his own ends.

However, in the 1880s a new type of haunted house narrative emerged in which the investigators, though still amateurs and hobbyists, are more focussed on the solution of the mystery and rendering the domestic space inhabitable for current and future residents, than with their own personal agendas. A desire to understand and interact with the supernatural is often the motivating factors in these narratives, along with a desire to help the spirit move on to the next phase of their existence. Spiritualism and Theosophy had reached new heights of popularity by this time and these texts are more in tune with

the spirit of fascination with the Other World that these movements promoted, than with the fear of encountering it. In their desire to solve the metaphysical problem, these psychic detectives find themselves interacting with the haunted domestic space in new ways to their predecessors: they must integrate themselves into it rather than battle against it. In doing so, the overtly masculine tone of many of the earlier stories (even those by female writers) is mitigated in these texts in which the investigator must play the roles of both observer and participant in the dramas that are unfolding in order to effect a solution. The investigator must attune himself to the ghost's agenda rather than following his own, and, as a result, the atmosphere of the narrative is not one of anxiety but of problem solving. It is this emphasis upon mediation and problem solving that distinguishes the psychic detective genre from the Gothic narrative. Cultural anxiety does not dominate these stories. Though characters may be anxious for various reasons, the narrative is driven by the investigative plot in which the character of the psychic detective embodies modern, progressive notions of resolution rather than conflict.

Margaret Oliphant's story, "The Open Door" (1881) is one of the first haunted house narratives to offer this kind of resolution. This tale involves what is essentially a team of investigators, each with differing motivations, who bring their own perspectives to the situation. The narrator, Colonel Mortimer, returning from service in India, rents a house on the outskirts of Edinburgh for his family. Soon his young son, Roland, who is tellingly described as "fragile in body" and "deeply sensitive in mind" (4), begins suffering from a nervous illness. He admits to his father that the cause of his distress is the voices he has been hearing in the remains of the old house that once stood on the site of their more modern home. The disembodied voice repeatedly begs to be "let in" the door that is almost all that remains of the previous residence. He pleads with his father to remedy the ghost's distress, confident in his ability:

"I should know if I was you," said the child eagerly. "That is what I always said to myself, - Father will know. Oh, papa, papa, to have to face it night after night, in such terrible, terrible trouble, and never to be

able to do it any good! ... Oh, think, papa, - think if it was me! ... You go and help it, and mother can take care of me. ... I was sure you would know as soon as you came. I always said, Father will know.” (19)

The boy's father, both touched and worried by the faith his son has expressed in his ability to instinctively know the way to soothe a troubled soul, is placed in a difficult situation. He must overcome his personal fear for his child as well as his disbelief in ghostly phenomena in order to attempt his mission:

It is bad enough to find your child's mind possessed with the conviction that he has seen, or heard, a ghost; but that he should require you to go instantly and help the ghost was the most bewildering experience that had ever come my way. I am a sober man myself and not superstitious. Of course I do not believe in ghosts; but I don't deny, any more than other people, that there are stories which I cannot pretend to understand. My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer; for that generally means a hysterical temperament and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children. But that I should take up his ghost and right its wrongs, and save it from its trouble, was such a mission as was enough to confuse any man. (19-20)

This passage is enlightening on a number of levels. Firstly, the narrator is caught in a conflation of the typically maternal and paternal roles; he is not asked to combat and vanquish the threat to his domestic space but to help soothe and nourish a troubled spirit. However his anxiety does not seem to be caused by being required to perform a maternal role. Rather he is concerned that his failure to perform this role adequately will lessen his status as “Father”, in his son's eyes. Thus, paradoxically, his masculine role is determined upon his ability to perform a feminine one successfully. It is interesting to see how he has already begun to resolve this in the last line, by reformulating his task in terms of advocacy rather than counselling. By righting “its wrongs”, regardless of the particular methodology employed, the pending investigation is reconceptualised as an act of charity or the provision of aid, a more gender-neutral role. A similar commingling of gender roles is also observed in the person of his son. The narrator fears for his son's masculinity, since ghost-seers are constructed as weak and feminine, yet he is also proud of his son's self-sacrifice and generosity of spirit in desiring to help one less fortunate

than himself, qualities valued in both men and women in an age that placed so much emphasis upon social welfare and charitable works.

In addition to coming to terms with the gender issues above, the narrator is also attempting to understand his own relationship with the supernatural. Since he fears that ghost-seers are constructed as weakly feminine he immediately contrasts himself with this view by professing his “sober” nature, but, perhaps recalling the task at hand, immediately mitigates his assurance that “of course” he doesn’t believe, by his admission of things he cannot explain. These complexities are addressed and worked through in the remainder of the narrative.

Having spoken to the elderly servants and visited the haunted doorway himself, experiencing something unaccountable, his first impulse is anger and a desire for scientific explanation, reactions that could be understood as stereotypically masculine in the nineteenth-century, but he soon realises that neither approach will actually resolve the problem:

My heart was full of bitterness against the stolid retainers of a family who were content to risk other people’s children and comfort rather than let a house lie empty. If I had been warned I might have taken precautions, or left the place, or sent Roland away, a hundred things which now I could not do; and here I was with my boy in a brain-fever, and his life, the most precious life on earth, hanging in the balance, dependent on whether or not I could get to the reason of a commonplace ghost story! ... [T]o take Roland away, even if he were able to travel, would not settle his agitated mind; and I feared that even a scientific explanation of refracted sound or reverberation ... would have very little effect upon the boy. (27-28)

It eventually becomes apparent that the only way to resolve the situation is to actually follow his son’s instructions: find and help the ghost. Though at this stage the narrator is less a psychic detective than the “accidental hero” forced to save his son, he soon calls in reinforcements to assist in the investigation. He first calls upon his butler, Bagley, “a soldier who had been with me in India, and was not supposed to fear anything, - man or devil” (31). In their joint investigation they experience all that Roland related:

the crying, pleading for “Mother”, knocking at the door to be let in. While the narrator feels immense pity commingled with his fear, Bagley, whose bravery had never failed against foes he could fight, experiences the terror of powerlessness when faced with the supernatural. This episode is reminiscent of Bulwer-Lytton’s story, in which the investigator’s courageous assistant “fails” him, but in this case, the events serve less to demonstrate the narrator’s bravery, for Oliphant’s narrator honestly admits his own fear, than to emphasise that the typically masculine qualities of bravery and courage are not of particular use in this situation.

Next the narrator turns to the local doctor, Simson, who has been treating his son. Simson, the epitome of scientific common sense, asserts “there’s no accounting for the freaks our brains are subject to” (44) but is eventually convinced to lend his particular expertise to the investigation, largely to prove his point regarding the non-existence of ghosts. This time the narrator feels no fear but “a triumphant satisfaction” (47) when the doctor, being used as something of a test-case, gradually ceases scoffing and laughing and admits “I can’t tell what to think of it” (50). His satisfaction is short-lived as he realises that, yet again, the approach he has tested offers no real solution. In spite of this, the Doctor is determined to see things through and proposes to return the following night.

Having attempted bravery, science and common sense, the narrator finally turns to the parish minister, Dr. Moncrieff, whom he respects enormously:

The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, not so strong in Greek, strongest of all in experience[.] ... He was old-fashioned; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublous problems of theology as many of the young men, ... but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. (52-53)

Moncrieff asks to assist in the evening’s investigation, offering his age, experience and faith as his qualifications: “I’m an old man; I’m less liable to be frightened than those that are further off the world unseen. It behooves me to think of my own journey there. I’ve

no cut-and-dry beliefs on the subject. I'll come too; and maybe at the moment the Lord will put into our heads what to do" (54). Mortimer is reassured by the priest's offer to assist in resolving the situation, for he understands that it is not endurance or explanation that is needed, but resolution: "It was no ghost to me. I knew the creature, and it was in trouble. ... [T]o do something for it was the great problem; how was I to be serviceable to a being that was invisible, that was mortal no longer?" (54)

When the time comes for all three investigators (the brave Bagley still suffering in bed) to face the supernatural presence, the priest makes a surprising discovery: he thinks he knows the ghost. When he begins to call "Willie, Willie! Oh, God preserve us! Is it you?" (60), Mortimer fears that his friend has left his senses but soon observes: "his whole being seemed absorbed in anxiety and tenderness" (61). The priest continues to question and lecture the spirit:

"Why come ye here frightening them that know ye not? Why came ye not to me? ... Is this right to come here? Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No! – I forbid ye! I forbid ye! ... Cry out no more to man. Go home, ye wandering spirit! ... You'll find her with the Lord. Go there and seek her, not here. ... He'll let you in, though it's late. Man, take heart! If you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's gate, and not your poor mother's ruined door. ... Go home to the Father – the Father!" (61-62)

Mortimer thinks he sees something throw itself through the door, and all otherworldly noise ceases. The priest has helped the spirit to pass through to the other side. The theme of Fatherhood has also come full circle. Roland's faith in his father is echoed in Dr Moncrieff's assurances that the Father will be able to help.

Throughout the story, the symbolism of the ruined doorway is stressed. It is "a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing" (8) and "futile, a kind of emblem of vanity: all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that semblance of an enclosure, - that way of entrance, unnecessary,

leading to nothing” (55). The repetition of the pathos inherent in a door that leads to nothing is, in essence, the message of the story, for all of the investigators, regardless of their initial perceptions, eventually realise that this door is actually symbolic of the world beyond, and that for the poor ghost they eventually manage to help, the door leads to somewhere. This religious dimension of the progress offered to the “poor” spirit is also a feature of many of the charitable organisations seeking to assist the working classes. Though material aid is important, spiritual aid was also considered a necessity by many.⁶

In this story each of the psychic detectives, led by Mortimer, attempts to solve the problem in their own way. Bagley uses his bravery and physical force to deal with any situation, Doctor Simson believes science and common sense exclude the possibility of the supernatural so searches for a human agency, and the priest, Moncrieff, sees the spirit as a lost soul seeking reunion with God. Mortimer sees his role as paternalistic, trying to help in any way that he can. In the end it is a combination of Mortimer’s desire to relieve the ghost’s suffering and Moncrieff’s prayers that affect a positive resolution of the situation. The aim of this story is not to disparage the scientific approach, though the doctor is depicted unsympathetically, but to emphasise the fact that the ghost is a former “person” not just an entity to be studied. The aim is to understand and help, not to turn the entity into a spectacle, which is what occurs in many of the earlier stories. The ghost in this story is treated with both pity and a certain degree of condescension, almost as if it were a member of the lower classes deserving of charity. The psychic detectives in this story act like social reformers, offering well-meaning but paternalistic assistance.

Though at first the spirit engenders fear, it ends up becoming a figure of pity. Any anxiety manifested in this story is of a more personal nature (Mortimer’s fear of his son being ill, of not being a good father) than more widespread cultural concerns. Though the space is nominally a domestic one, and the person most at risk is a young child, the ghost

⁶ The difficulties she suffered in her own life would have made her naturally sympathetic to the suffering of others, and this sympathy shows clearly in “The Open Door”. Two of Oliphant’s children died in their infancy and her husband died early, leaving her to raise and support their three surviving children. In addition she took on the responsibility of supporting her brother and his children after his financial ruin in Canada. For a full account of Oliphant’s life see her *Autobiographies and Letters* (1899) and Elisabeth Jay. *Mrs. Oliphant: A Fiction to Herself*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.

is treated very much like a former resident who has become lost rather than an “invasion” of the family’s domestic space. The priest is in a unique position in that he forms a bridge between the past and present residents of this rented property. He is able to use his knowledge of the previous inhabitants to understand the situation and rectify it in the present.

There are significant similarities between this story of Oliphant’s and a later short tale by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Brown Hand” (1899). Though Doyle was politically conservative, many of the ideas expressed in his work are nonetheless concerned with notions of cultural progress. Doyle’s associations with Spiritualism are well-known, and it is perhaps on this register that his progressive ideas are most clearly seen. They manifest in his supernatural stories as a tendency to promote the bridging of this world and the next, the past and the present, and positing a future in which these associations occur to the general benefit of all. A distinction is made in this thesis between political progressivism, denoting a direct association with radical liberalism, and a more general belief in progress, for individuals and mankind, that can be said to have characterised the period, not just politically but socially and spiritually as well.

One of the spiritual principles underpinning Theosophical doctrines, that of “practical altruism”, is of particular relevance in this context, given the attitudes of Doyle and Kipling’s psychic detectives. Bartzokas writes that “to merit the honourable title of Theosophist one must be an altruist, above all; one ever ready to help equally foe or friend, to act, rather than to speak; and urge others to action, while never losing an opportunity to work himself” (*Compassion* 137). While neither author is associated explicitly with the Theosophical movement, the principle of “practical altruism”, as opposed to theoretical altruism where the concept is approved of in principle but not put into direct action, is displayed by their amateur psychic detectives, for whom helping is its own reward.

In “The Brown Hand” the new inhabitants of the rented property have also just returned from India. In this case, a retired Indian surgeon, Sir Dominick Holden, returns

to England, renting a large property for himself and his wife. The significance of this shift in location for these stories (and presumably many other late Victorian narratives that are based on a similar premise) is to emphasise the discrepancies between the colonial (uncivilised or archaic) setting and modern Britain. To encounter the supernatural, or the “superstitious” as it is often referred to, in such a modern setting is therefore particularly upsetting. However, even though this discrepancy may cause an initial shock, as the protagonists of Doyle’s tale discover, a modern culture also develops new methods for resolving supernatural problems.

The once-strong surgeon is now emaciated, his “spirit cowed and crushed” (73), his eyes reflecting “the furtive, expectant look of the dog whose master has taken the whip from the rack” (73). His nephew Hardacre, also a medical man, detects his uncle’s distress “upon one glance at those critical and yet appealing eyes” (73), and in spite of his pride, Holden trusts his nephew with the source of his suffering: a nightly supernatural visitation. However, instead of the disbelief or ridicule that he feared from a modern man of science, Holden is pleased to find that his nephew is actually very interested in the situation: “the abnormal in psychical experiences was a subject to which I had, like many neurologists, devoted a great deal of attention. ... [A]s a member of the Psychical Research Society, I had formed one of a committee of three who spent the night in a haunted house” (74). Holden gladly accepts his nephew’s offer to investigate the haunting and to assist with removing the problem if possible. The older man seems particularly pleased by the fact that Hardacre is both experienced and scientifically minded:

Your head seems to be cool and steady. ... You have some special knowledge upon these subjects, and you evidently view them from that philosophical standpoint which robs them of all vulgar terror. I presume that the sight of an apparition would not seriously discompose you? ... Would even interest you perhaps? ... As a psychical observer, you would probably investigate it in as impersonal a fashion as an astronomer investigates a wandering comet[.] (75)

His spirits are raised by the prospect of someone confirming him in his experience as he had lately begun to doubt his own senses, fearing madness. His relief may also be due to the fact that his nephew proposes to investigate the situation in a modern scientific manner rather than using a superstitious or “magical” approach that he may have met with in the colonies. Holden enters into the scientific spirit of the investigation, suggesting to his nephew that:

your experiences will have a higher evidential value if you are not told in advance what you may expect to encounter. You yourself are aware of the quibbles of unconscious cerebration and subjective impressions with which a scientific sceptic may throw a doubt on your statement. It would be well to guard against them in advance. (75)

Like the earlier detectives, Hardacre is motivated by his curiosity, but also an honest desire to effect a resolution. He places no particular emphasis on his bravery or courage; instead he stresses his qualifications as a scientist and a psychological researcher:

I have no pretence to greater physical courage than my neighbours, but familiarity with a subject robs it of those vague and undefined terrors which are the most appalling to the imaginative mind. The human mind is capable of only one strong emotion at a time, and if it be filled with curiosity or scientific enthusiasm, there is no room for fear. . . . [I]t was with something of the pleasurable thrill of anticipation with which the sportsman takes his position beside the haunt of his game that I shut the laboratory door behind me. (76)

That night, Hardacre encounters the ghost “with a thrill which all my scientific absorption could not entirely prevent” (77), yet the description he provides is unemotional, even clinical in tone, clearly detailing the apparition’s clothing, movements and facial expressions. The following morning he compares these particulars with Holden’s own experience, finding them to coincide exactly. Now that his experiment cannot be compromised, a fuller explanation of the occurrences is offered. The apparition is one of Holden’s former patients, a man from a nomadic mountain tribe who needed his badly injured hand removed though, “according to his religion it was an all-important matter that the body should be reunited after death and so make a perfect dwelling for the

spirit” (78-9). The doctor, able to preserve the disembodied hand much better than the nomad, promises to keep it safe for him. Unfortunately it is destroyed in a house fire and Holden thinks no more of it until the spirit appears seeking to reclaim it. The apparition has been making nightly visits for four years, investigating the specimens in the home in search of his missing appendage. The visitations began in India but continued even after the surgeon and his wife returned to Britain. The implication seems to be that in India the couple were able to find no solution, but having returned to a country deeply interested in psychical research, their nephew may be able to provide the resolution they seek.

Now that Hardacre understands the case more fully, he returns to London to conduct some research. Eventually he finds a useful reference in a “recent book upon occultism” (80), which suggests that “in the case of earth-bound spirits, some one dominant idea obsessing them at the hour of death is sufficient to hold them in this material world. ... As a rule it springs from some unfulfilled wish, and when the wish is fulfilled the material bond relaxes” (80). Hardacre’s book also implies that sometimes it is sufficient for a “reasonable compromise” to be offered. To this end he acquires a “brown hand” from a fellow doctor at a mortuary and returns to his uncle’s residence in high spirits. That night, when the apparition appears, he finds a new specimen among the jars, but in a humorous twist the spectre, “convulsed with fury and disappointment” (81) flings it aside angrily. A perplexed Hardacre soon realises his mistake: he had provided that spirit with a second left hand. The following night the experiment is repeated with a more suitable substitute, which is gratefully accepted.

Just as in “The Open Door”, Doyle’s amateur psychic detective learns the reason for the ghostly visitation and does his best to provide the assistance necessary for the spirit to move on from the earthly realm. In order for this transition to be successfully facilitated the detective must truly believe in the reality of the supernatural manifestation, in spite of its apparent Otherness, and honestly desire to help. The invasion of the domestic space⁷ by a doubly foreign entity is resolved by interacting with the spirit on its

⁷ In spite of the fact that the specimens are kept in a room the doctor has set up as a laboratory, the ghost visits Holden in his bedchamber as well as the laboratory, and the laboratory itself contains a settee for

own terms. The psychic detective is then able to resolve the problems of the past in the present.

This emphasis upon bridging the gap between the past and the present, bringing with it the possibility of positive resolution and hope for the future is characteristic of many haunted house narratives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century. In terms of modern housing, this often means delving into the private, domestic affairs of a previous inhabitant, a role performed by the psychic detective. This aspect of the psychic detective role is particularly evident in Rudyard Kipling's⁸ "The House Surgeon" (1909). The story is based on a real house that Kipling and his wife inhabited during a short stay in England. Kipling writes of their time there:

a growing desperation ... enveloped us both – a gathering of blackness of mind and sorrow of the heart, that each put down to the new, soft climate and, without telling the other, fought against for long weeks. It was the Feng-shui – the Spirit of the house itself – that darkened the sunshine and fell upon us every time we entered, checking the very words on our lips. (Kipling in Joshi (ed) *The Mark of the Beast and Other Horror Tales* xii)

In the story the M'Leod family suffer an unaccountable depression within the walls of their new home, Holmescroft. Kipling is at pains to emphasise the thoroughly modern nature of the property: it has been fitted out with electric lights, new drains and plumbing, and two tennis courts, forming part of "an exclusive residential district of dustless roads and elegantly designed country villas, each standing in from three to five acres of perfectly appointed land" (161). The estate even sports a golf-links. The family has purchased the property, but obviously aware of the abundance of haunted residences, they pay an extra thousand pounds for it since the estate agent is willing to give the property a "clean bill of health," assuring them that "no death had taken place in the

sleeping. There is a commingling of domestic and working spaces in the house but the ghost does not discriminate between them, visiting both.

⁸ Kipling too was politically conservative but, like Doyle, his work reflects larger notions of cultural and spiritual progress.

house since it was built” (166). Unfortunately this proves to be no guarantee against unnatural effects, for the family soon begins to experience odd sensations of depression in conjunction with the feeling that someone is trying to communicate, but cannot.

Maxwell M’Leod approaches the story’s narrator, Mr Perseus, after he is overheard discussing ghosts and hauntings with a group of friends. Although deeply interested in psychical phenomena, Perseus admits he has never actually conducted an investigation. This does not deter M’Leod who invites him to visit Holmescroft to do what he can. On his arrival, Mrs M’Leod assures the amateur investigator that the events are not the result of anything “we ourselves have ever done in our lives – that I will swear to you ... [a]nd we have changed our servants several times. So we know it is not *them*” (164). This initial exchange highlights the fact that the M’Leods are aware of the conventional “reasons” behind a suspected haunting: retribution for previous wrongdoing or nervous and problematic servants. Having ruled these out, the house’s past is therefore immediately suspect, and what is needed is a detective who is able to dig up this past then deal with it in the present.

Spending time in the house, it is not long before the narrator begins to share the family’s suffering:

I was aware of a little grey shadow, as it might have been a snowflake seen against the light, floating at an immense distance in the background of my brain. It annoyed me, and I shook my head to get rid of it. Then my brain telegraphed that it was the forerunner of a swift-striding gloom which there was yet time to escape if I would force my thoughts away from it ... [b]ut the gloom overtook me before I could take in the meaning of the message. ... Despair upon despair, misery upon misery, fear after fear, each causing their distinct and separate woe, packed in upon me for an unrecorded length of time. (162)

Perseus also experiences the sensation of muted communication: “[b]ehind the pain I was conscious there was a desire on somebody’s part to explain something on which some tremendously important issue hung” (165). He conveys a powerful sense of the entity’s

frustration and impotence, “as though some dumb and bound power were striving against gag and bond to deliver its soul of an articulate word” (170). Perseus therefore understands his task as one of facilitating communication. Since the entity in the house seems unable to communicate directly, the detective must therefore find alternative means through which to understand its message. He believes that the best way to do this is to understand the house’s past more fully. If the ghost cannot talk in the present, perhaps the past can.

Miss M’Leod, the couple’s grown daughter, fears Perseus will merely “tell the Psychological Society” (166) then forget all about them, but having been convinced of the reality of their experience he is driven to help. He commences his investigation by looking into the property’s history, trying to get information out of Baxter, the estate agent, by posing as a potential buyer. M’Leod is more than willing to play along with his subterfuge, entering into extensive correspondence with the agent about the possible sale. Upon discovering Baxter is actually related to the previous owners, Perseus even pretends to be interested in golf (a “detestable game” (168)) to draw him out about his three elderly cousins.

The Misses Moultrie had resided in Holmescroft since it was built, only moving after the death of the youngest. To Perseus they represent the living past, a possible conduit for communication between “then” and “now”. This association between the living sisters and the past is strengthened by their characterisation. The oldest sister, Mary, is described by her cousin Baxter as “an unforgiving woman who would never let bygones be” (168). She is represented as really living in the past in spite of her existence in the present. After meeting her, Perseus is even more blunt in his description, characterising her as “a tall, horse-headed elderly lady of decided manners” (170) possessing “a dead, flat voice, with a sunken eye that looked and saw not” (171). Her younger sister, Elizabeth, is described in similarly unflattering terms as “a small and withered thing with twitching lips’ (171). The oldest sister, the dominant of the two, is clearly preoccupied, even obsessed with the past. Eventually Perseus manages to draw out of her the reason for this: it is revealed that the youngest sister, Agnes, died by falling

out a window at Holmescroft, an unfortunate event that the sisters believed was an act of suicide.

Staunchly Christian and unforgiving by temperament, Mary broods over her sister's suspected suicide night and day. She assures Perseus (who she is only willing to talk to for she mistakes him for a doctor) that, "I see the house every day – every night. I am always there in spirit – waking or sleeping" (175). It is not until Mary almost falls prey to the same accident, desperately seeking fresh air in the middle of the night to relieve a choking fit caused by an hereditary illness, that they realise the circumstantial evidence they believed pointed to suicide could just as easily prove an accidental death.

Desiring proof, Mary is convinced to revisit their former home to inspect the window for herself and soon realises her sister is not a suicide, just the victim of an unlucky series of events. Through her admission that "I know now. Aggie didn't do it! ... We've misjudged poor Aggie ... But I feel she knows now. Wherever she is, she knows that we know she is guiltless" (177), the house is cleansed of its oppressive atmosphere, becoming once again "a light, spacious, airy house, full of the sense of well-being and peace – above all things, of peace. ... There was no terror there, present or lurking" (176). By coming to terms with the past, Mary is able to let go of her depression and hostility. Focusing her attention on the present, and reconceptualising her understanding of the past, facilitates forgiveness and communication between the past and the present.

Perseus believes that Holmescroft was the site of a compound haunting. Aggie's spirit, desperate to find a way to communicate her innocence was responsible for the sense of muted protest while Mary's constant dwelling upon the site of her sister's death had caused the depressive atmosphere pervading the site. Once the psychic detective realises the cause of the problems lies both in the past and the present, he is able to use his knowledge of the family's history to affect reconciliation between the sisters, separated by both space and time.

The three post-1880 stories discussed in this chapter are by no means the sole examples of this trend in haunted house narratives. For example in Lanoe Falconer's novella *Cecilia de Noël* (1891) a series of visitors each inhabit a haunted room, some perceiving the ghost, some not, until Cecilia, noted for her charity and social work, determines what the ghost is seeking and is able to provide it. In this story the efforts of the male investigators are eventually overshadowed by the intuition and kindness of a brave woman. In a similar fashion, Algernon Blackwood's "The Damned" (1913) features a brother and sister psychic detective team, each endowed with particular artistic qualities (she is a painter, he a writer) that enable them to interpret the events occurring in their widowed friend's home. Eventually, in spite of their individual efforts, the resolution of the haunting is facilitated by renting the property to an unnamed organisation that promotes religious tolerance and charity who, by offering hope to the downtrodden effectively cleanse the atmosphere of its sense of dread and fear. These are merely a few of the many examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century haunted house narratives that offer the supernatural entities a form of positive resolution.

This is certainly not to say that after 1880 no narratives were produced in which the premise is a test of masculine bravery, or that the resolution offered, if any, is the site's destruction. On the contrary, the notion of a haunted site as a testing ground for personal qualities (particularly stereotypically masculine ones) is still utilised in contemporary narratives by authors such as Stephen King, Peter Straub and James Herbert, among others. Though these types of haunted house narrative have remained popular, what this chapter has demonstrated is that, particularly during this period, new types of stories were emerging, stories in which the cornerstone is not anxiety but the provision of a positive resolution for both parties.

For this progress to come about, the psychic detective must act as a mediator between seeming oppositions: the public and the private; the masculine and the feminine; the past and the present. Like the late nineteenth-century social reformers, eager to ensure the progress and wellbeing of those less fortunate than themselves, these psychic detectives approach the ghosts with empathy and an honest desire to help. By integrating

themselves into the domestic space and attempting to understand the forces that have led the ghost to its present predicament, the detectives are able to offer positive resolution: the social reform ideal. While from the perspective of the haunted families, positive resolution may simply mean the absence of the ghostly presence, these psychic detective narratives move beyond merely the reclamation of contested space towards a more progressive ethos. As was the case with the urban renewal projects taking place in the East End and other working class “slums”, the objective of these psychic detectives is to assist the ghost to move on to a better future (or afterlife) rather than to simply force it out of sight. Like the social reformers, the middle class families depicted learn to understand their less fortunate ghostly neighbour, and assist with improving its lot in order to create a form of resolution that is of benefit to both parties.

Progressive notions of social reform, new constructions of gender identity and a popular interest in understanding rather than vanquishing the supernatural, combined to produce stories in which the psychic detective is able to bridge the gap between the past and the present, offering a more positive future for both the residents of the afflicted sites and the supernatural entities themselves. Gothic understandings of fraught domesticity fail to take this more progressive trend into account when discussing the anxiety caused by changing gender roles and the challenges of modernity. Certainly haunted house narratives can be understood as manifesting these elements, but as is evident from the analysis of the above texts, the figure of the psychic detective, regardless of his amateur status, is portrayed as negotiating these sites of potential anxiety, at times successfully combining gender roles, embracing modern notions of the supernatural and applying progressive notions of altruism to help rather than eliminate the entities which intrude upon middle-class domesticity.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LONDON LABYRINTH

In this chapter the site of investigation shifts from the domestic sphere of the home to the wider and equally contested space of the city of London. Like the home, the city is a liminal space in which the public and private spheres collide. The urban environment is both a place of work and of habitation, in which the lives of individuals merge with the throng of the crowd. It is on the often bustling but sometimes eerily deserted streets of London that the Welsh author Arthur Machen's psychic detectives are most "at home", seeking their amusement, occupation and the answers to supernatural mysteries. This chapter will examine three texts by Machen, published in 1894 and 1895.¹ *The Great God Pan*, *The Inmost Light*, and "The Red Hand". Although ostensibly about different events and themes, all feature psychic detectives and share a focus on London as a site of mystery and the macabre. Discussions of the city as "Gothic" are not new to studies of *fin de siècle* fiction, but this chapter seeks to move beyond the usual discourses of urban anxiety by demonstrating how Machen's psychic detective narratives also embody a number of elements characteristic of the new approaches of science and the progressive social sciences in the late nineteenth-century, such as the role of chance and coincidence and the notion of the modern city as a "text" that can be "read" by a suitably experienced inhabitant.

Machen's depiction of supernatural entities differs from those discussed in the previous chapter. Where those ghosts tended to be portrayed as lost, confused and in need of help, Machen's manifestations are more proactively malignant. This is particularly evident in his tales concerning the "little people", which will be discussed in Chapter Five, but can also be seen in the figure of Helen from *The Great God Pan* and, to a lesser

¹ One of Machen's most famous works *The Three Impostors* was also published in 1895 but will not be addressed in this chapter. Although it features Dyson, one of the psychic detectives from Machen's previous stories, and events in the text hinge upon chance occurrences, the majority of the narrative comprises short, embedded stories that are independent (though arguably thematically linked) of the meta-narrative. Since this meta-narrative contains no real supernatural element it offers less to the discussion of psychic detectives than some of Machen's other work. One of the short tales from this text, "The Black Seal", will be discussed in the context of the late nineteenth-century revival of mythology in Chapter Five.

extent, Mrs. Black in *The Inmost Light*.² One of the primary reasons for Machen's frequent inclusion in the Gothic category is this emphasis upon supernatural beings that induce terror and, most importantly, *seem to get away with it*. This is taken to mean that Machen's narratives depict, in Hurley's words, the "ruination of the human subject" (*The Gothic Body* 3). Where the detectives in the previous chapter are able to bring about positive resolutions to their cases, Machen's detectives are usually only able to chronicle evil rather than prevent it. While this negativity is an undeniable feature of Machen's early work,³ it is possible to see beyond this surface-level "horror" to the deeper investigation about the nature of the material world and how we interact with it.

Specifically, this chapter argues that Machen's psychic detectives demonstrate the importance of a symbolic, interpretative worldview that allows the investigator to understand the variety of forces (both material and immaterial) that create and control their environments. In these stories the quest to "know the unknowable" ultimately leads to tragic results and yet, through a process of careful observation, the interpretation of symbolism and acquiescence to the "rules" of the environment, Machen's psychic detectives are able to piece together events and create order from seeming chaos. Though nothing can be done to rectify the original "horrors", Machen's work explores the tension between an admission of unknowability and a desire to know that was a significant feature of much turn-of-the-century scientific and social-scientific enquiry. As Machen's psychic detectives demonstrate, it is only by coming to terms with this tension, and admitting the importance of both the rational and the irrational, the material and the ephemeral, the ordered and the random that true understanding and progress can be achieved.

Though Machen questions the role of science in ensuring progress, progress itself can be understood in a number of ways and in a variety of registers. As was the case with

² Though Mrs Black is never shown *doing* anything terrible or even supernatural it is made clear that her very *being* is "evil" due to her lack of soul.

³ Machen's stories after the turn of the century begin to take up new themes such as the revival of the Celtic church and the possibility of regeneration through the grail and are therefore more positive in tone.

Doyle, Machen's sense of "progress" is often spiritual or mystical in nature and involves the growth of understanding (both personal and collective) rather than "advancement" in materialistic or even physical terms. As this thesis demonstrates, progress meant different things to different people, and although the means may differ, what they have in common is a sense that humanity is on the brink of something, and that to ensure its fulfilment requires a commitment of transcending boundaries, merging binaries and seeking a reunion of the material and the spiritual.

Machen, Occultism and Science

Arthur Machen⁴ was born in Caerleon-on-Usk, Wales, once known as Isca Silurum, the headquarters of the Second Augustan Legion, during the 4th century Roman occupation of Britain. The wild countryside and the Roman ruins, the sites of his childhood rambles, haunted Machen's imagination all his life. The Welsh countryside and the folklore that Machen experienced in his youth were a source of both wonder and terror for the aspiring writer, and these influences can be clearly seen in his fiction. Machen, descended from four generations of High Church ministers, maintained his family's tradition of Christianity "tinged with Welsh mysticism" (Sweetser 58) while also becoming interested in modern mysticism, ritual magic and the occult.

Throughout his life Machen had a complex relationship with occultism. In 1885, after moving to London to pursue a career in letters, he found work cataloguing occult books for publisher and bookseller George Redway. In addition, his lifelong friendship with Arthur Edward Waite led to Machen's brief participation in the Golden Dawn after the death of his first wife. However, in spite of an ongoing interest in the mystical and unseen, he later remarked: "I make nothing much of the great gusts of incense that were

⁴ A number of biographies of Machen exist. Perhaps the most comprehensive is the recently published *The Life of Arthur Machen* by John Gasworth. Gasworth, a young admirer and friend of the author, wrote the biography in the 1930s but it was not published until 2005 when Tartarus Press undertook the task at the request of the "Friends of Arthur Machen". See also Aiden Reynolds and William Charlton. *Arthur Machen: A Short Account of His Life and Work*. London: The Richards Press, 1963, and Wesley D. Sweetser. *Arthur Machen*. New York: Twayne, 1964. Machen also published a two-part collection of reminiscences, *Far off Things* (1922) and *Things Near and Far* (1923).

blown in those days into my nostrils” (*Things Near and Far* 128), though he admitted, “I must confess that it did me a great deal of good – for the time” (149).

In spite of his interest in occult studies, Machen harboured a dislike of Spiritualism, which he refers to disparagingly in *The London Adventure* (1924) as the “amiable Conandoylery that is now in such fashion in certain quarters” (27). With reference to the popular practice of holding séances, Machen writes: “I have no belief in the art of necromancy; I do not think that the spirits of the dead can be conjured into a parlour by people sitting round a table in the dark – or in the light either” (66). Machen’s problem with Spiritualism seems to have been the way in which it demystified and made “safe” the possibilities of the other world. In talking of a séance he witnessed during his acting days, Machen reflects with concern: “when their desire is realised, as they suppose, there is no trace of horror. There is no sense of the awfulness of another order of being impinging on ours. It is all as cheerful as a tea-party” (67). That there are realms in which the spirits of the dead and perhaps things more monstrous abide is not in question. Rather, Machen’s point seems to have been that these realms are “unconjectured worlds which it is not meant to visit” (68). The very act of psychical research would seem then to be akin to the rending of the veil or trespassing on forbidden territory. In Machen’s own words: “[t]here are, unhappily, in these days, people who profane these holy mysteries” (46). It is therefore not surprising that this theme of penetrating the Other World and its consequences recurs frequently within Machen’s fiction, and is a particular focus of both *The Great God Pan*, and *The Inmost Light*. The perpetrators in these texts are medical men eager to undertake what prove to be disastrous researches into psychic realms.

Whatever Machen’s personal feelings towards Spiritualism and psychical research may have been, it is clear that the working through of these issues in his fiction is not as clear cut as it may at first appear. Discussing *The Great God Pan* and some of the incidents from *The Three Impostors*, Berta Nash writes:

In these tales are manifested, perhaps consciously, the already conventional opposition between the scientist and the spiritualist, the materialist and the seeker after the invisible, the imponderable, the

immeasurable. At first glance it would seem that Machen is fighting on the side of the angels and is wholeheartedly opposed to the scientific materialist. Actually, however, Machen does not oppose the material per se, but seeks a reconciliation of natural and supernatural. In providing a material, scientifically verifiable means for achieving his end, he thus works to construct a bridge connecting the opposing angry cliffs. (“Machen Among the Arthurians” 112)

Wesley Sweetser makes a similar point, arguing that Machen’s “main criticism was of scientists who believe that their field of knowledge has the final answer. Of the real men of science, he contended that they realize that the greater man’s knowledge, the more profound and illimitable becomes the mystery of the universe” (55). “His sympathies”, Sweetser continues, “doubtless a product of his Celtic heritage, were therefore with occultism which sought – however mistakenly – to penetrate the unknown, as opposed to ordinary, not true, science which simply catalogued and renamed the known” (57). Machen’s views of the role of science within modern society are often seen as examples of cultural anxiety within his fiction. In particular, the scientist figures in *The Great God Pan* and *The Inmost Light*, whose experiments have such disastrous results, are assumed to represent *fin de siècle* mistrust in the powers of science and the influence it had in the modern world. However, Machen’s texts do more than simply highlight the dangers of science. They also engage with modern ideas of knowledge construction and the less programmatic views of the new sciences.

In a society where notions of definite “knowability” were under serious challenge by the new sciences and developments in physics and mathematics, the possibility of a world that is governed by clear and obvious rules seemed outdated. “Beginning in the 1870s, [...] traditionally comfortable epistemological and ontological theories were eroded fatally by the new sciences. In particular, the concept of chance, inherent especially in Darwinian biology, subverted the ascendant rationalist reliance upon a determinate physical, social, and psychic order regulated by discernable natural laws” (Soffer 8). Machen’s stories depict the unintended consequences of experiments, and these events occur because the scientist fails to realise that the world is not simple and controllable. Chance and unpredictability turn the experiments of Machen’s scientists

into “horrors”, but this can be seen as a criticism of scientific arrogance rather than science as a whole. The crime is in assuming that the spiritual and mystical is able to be explained away by science, ignoring the role of the ineffable, the chaotic and the random that are also essential components of human experience. Notions of chance, probability and contingency were the focus of the new sciences, and Machen’s narratives also emphasise the importance of these factors in coming to a personal understanding of reality.

Similarly, the developments in modern science also stress the fact that, since the older, mechanical models of the world require revision, the world is now open to new interpretations. This is evident not only in the hard sciences but also the popular interest in psychical and occult studies and the emerging social sciences, which were concerned with creating new understandings of the role of the individual within the social context. In all of these disciplines, the man who is able to “read” the “text” and make meaning out of the chaos of modernity is the expert, initiate or professional. Machen’s detectives, through their engagement with ideas of chance and randomness and their detailed knowledge of the urban space, are able to construct meaning for a social context that to the non-expert would seem merely a welter of confusion. While the protagonists of these tales are not professional psychic detectives they are experts in their field: the city of London. To be an “expert” in this field, Machen’s detectives must prove that they can understand both aspects of reality: the material, scientific and logical and the spiritual, symbolic and random.

Decadence and Degeneration Vs Symbolism and Ecstasy

Machen’s view of the world was highly symbolic. His religious and occult interests, along with the folklore of his native Wales, contributed to his perception of a reality hidden behind everyday events and objects. In his fiction this reality is often portrayed as terrifying, but it is the terror of the soul glimpsing beyond the veil rather than secular or physical fear. As Sweetser suggests, “Machen’s works normally do not convey horror in the usual sense of physical fear and revulsion, but only in a spiritual

sense of omnipresent sin and evil on a strictly transcendental plane” (85). Though *The Great God Pan* is a favourite case study among Gothic critics,⁵ the symbolic aspect of Machen’s work is often misunderstood as “decadent”.⁶

In *Fictions of British Decadence* (2006) Kirsten MacLeod defines literary “Decadence” as “the insistence on the autonomy of art; a disgust with bourgeois philistinism and utilitarianism; an interest in complexity of form and elaborate arcane language; a fascination with the perverse, the morbid, and the artificial; a desire for intense experience and a seeking after rare sensations in order to combat a feeling of *ennui* or world-weariness” (1). Though Machen’s fondness for Latin phrases and detailed description could be considered “elaborate arcane language”, and his use of symbolism is aimed towards combating the prevalence of a purely materialistic worldview, these are not the aspects that are usually addressed in critical discussions of Machen’s “Decadence”. Instead, his perceived emphasis on the degeneration of the human subject, discussed in Chapter Two in the context of the work of Kelly Hurley, David Punter and Susan Navarette, is conflated with “Decadent” artistic ideals. In fact, his inclusion in this category that more typically includes symbolist poets such as Arthur Symons, the French novelist Joris Karl Huysmans, artist Aubrey Beardsley and British dandy Oscar Wilde, is largely the result of his association with Bodley Head, the publisher of the notorious Yellow Book, which coloured the critical reception his texts received when they were first published.⁷

Contemporary reviews of *The Great God Pan* and *The Three Impostors* tended to converge upon two primary criticisms, firstly, that the texts were “unwholesome” and

⁵ For readings of Machen’s work within the context of the *fin de siècle* gothic see Julia Briggs. *Night Visitors: The Rise and fall of the English Ghost Story*. London: Faber, 1977; Glennis Byron and David Punter, eds. *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*. New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999; and Fred Botting. *Gothic*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

⁶ See for example Christine Ferguson. “Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment.” *PMLA* 117.3 (2002): 465-478; and Jill Tedford Owens. “Arthur Machen’s Supernaturalism: the Decadent Variety.” *University of Mississippi Studies in English*. 8 (1990): 117-126.

⁷ Critical reception of Machen’s work is relatively easy to trace since Machen collected his reviews and published them in a collection entitled *Precious Balms* (1924), limited to 250 signed copies.

“disgusting”, a charge levelled at the decadence and “art for arts sake” movements more generally, and secondly, that the element of “nameless terror” in Machen’s stories is ineffectual. The first of these is evident in a review from *The Lady’s Pictorial*, which characterises *The Great God Pan* as “gruesome, ghastly, and dull. ... [A]lthough men and women who are morbid and unhealthy in mind may find something that appeals to them in the description of Dr Raymond’s experiment and its results, the majority of readers will turn from it in utter disgust” (*Precious Balms* 12). Similarly, *The Manchester Guardian* asserts that “[t]he book is, on the whole, the most acutely and intentionally disagreeable we have yet seen in English” (8). Judgements such as these tend to rest upon the opinion that Machen’s stories contain references to rape, murder and suicide without the redeeming feature of a clear moral message.⁸

Alternatively, some critics objected to the books on more stylistic grounds, claiming that Machen’s “horrors” fail to convince. The reviewer for *The Daily Chronicle* complains that Machen “never lets us have so much as a glimpse of the monster for ourselves. How can we be petrified unless we see Medusa’s head?” (*Precious Balms* 3). Similarly, a writer for *The Echo* assures his readers that “Not the ghost of a ‘creepy’ feeling will this story produce in the mind of anybody who reads it” (5). This perceived stylistic failure is further emphasised by critics who saw Machen’s early work as little more than a poor imitation⁹ of the more successful work of Robert Louis Stevenson.¹⁰ These early perceptions of Machen’s work as decadent, concerned with the degeneration of the human subject or simply a poor attempt at creating a physical response of “horror” in readers, have remained remarkably consistent as can be seen in the Gothic criticism previously discussed. But in emphasising the physical and material in these stories, it is

⁸ This is a criticism common not only to texts perceived as decadent, but to literature believed to be influenced by contemporary French trends more generally, such as the Naturalism practiced by Emile Zola.

⁹ Indeed there are a number of noticeable similarities between Machen’s *The Three Impostors* (1895) and Stevenson’s *New Arabian Nights*, first published in 1882. The use of disguise and deception as a plot mechanism, as well as the narrative structure of a series of connected tales are common to both texts, as is the device of protagonist as urban adventurer. Like Stevenson’s heroes from the *New Arabian Nights*, Prince Florizel and Colonel Geraldine, Machen’s adventurers choose as their playground the mysterious and labyrinthine metropolis of London.

¹⁰ See for example the reviews from *The Chronicle* (*Precious Balms* 15), *The Guardian* (20-21), *The Pall Mall Gazette* (21-22) and *The Echo* (26-27).

my contention that we are missing the essential, symbolic and spiritual dimension of Machen's work, what Sweetser characterises as a "revolt against the conventional bourgeois approach to life, the typical Victorian attitude of the acceptance of surface realities" (81).

In *Hieroglyphics* (1924), a series of linked essays that address the question of what separates "fine literature" from mere "printed matter", Machen elaborates his own theory of literature based upon the principle of "ecstasy". Throughout the essays Machen defines "ecstasy" variously as rapture, beauty, adoration, wonder, awe, mystery, and the desire for, or sense of the unknown. His argument is that "ecstasy" is the element that distinguishes literature, for anything that lacks this quality, which is really an expression of the importance of symbolism and imagination, is merely description. Machen therefore criticises Realism and Naturalism in literature, comparing them to the camera that can only show one aspect of reality. He argues that "the camera and the soul of man are two entirely different things" (58), for the role of the camera is "to portray the surface of life, to make a picture of the outside of things" (59) whereas the human soul is capable of interpretation, of relating to the world symbolically and understanding events and objects in the material world as "outward sign[s] of an inward mystery" (74). His belief that "mere incident is nothing, it only becomes something when it is a symbol of an interior meaning" (80) is the guiding principle behind his mysteries and the basis upon which his psychic detectives operate.

Each of the texts discussed in this chapter, *The Great God Pan*, *The Inmost Light* and "The Red Hand", features a psychic detective who comes across a mystery by accident and investigates it as a result of curiosity. In the process they demonstrate the importance of looking not only at material "clues" but also below the surface realities of the city in order to understand the deeper truth, which is revealed through coincidence and chance encounters. It is only through this dual approach that the psychic detectives can form a skilled interpretation of the urban space.

London: Gothic Space or Modern Text?

The city as a site of anxiety is a commonplace in discussions of the *fin de siècle*. One source of the anxiety surrounding notions of the urban space was provided by the discourses of Social Darwinism which characterised the city as a site of degeneration,¹¹ where healthy people move in search of work but, in a matter of generations, the genetic stock is degraded and people become sickly, weak and criminal. In *The Heart of The Empire: Discussions of problems of modern city life in England* (1901) Charles Masterman writes that the city produces “a characteristic *physical* type of town dweller: stunted, narrow-chested, easily wearied; yet voluble, excitable, with little ballast, stamina, or endurance – seeking stimulus in drink, in betting, in any unaccustomed conflicts at home or abroad” (in Coleman 206).

Associated with understandings of the city a site of degeneration, are notions of London as the symbol of a decaying, decadent empire. In “Lost cities: London’s Apocalypse”¹² (1999) Alexandra Warwick discusses the trope of the old, decadent empire finally falling as a result of the culmination of destructive pressures from inside and out, in the context of turn of the century imperialism. Considering various descriptive passages in Machen’s writings, and H. G. Wells’s science-fiction novel *The War of the Worlds* (1897), Warwick explains how the vision of the crumbling city, as well as scenes of immorality within it are used as evidence of London’s decadence and therefore relates to the fears of disintegration and corruption held by urban dwellers (80). Similarly, in *Writing London: Volume 2* (2004), Julian Wolfreys suggests that from the nineteenth-century fictional depictions of London function as “phobic discourses having to do with class, race, foreignness, and sexuality” (41), making the city the “focal point for the exploration and expression of cultural anxiety” (54). However, Wolfrey’s suggestion that the “constant reiteration of a few key images pertaining to horror, abjection, the marginal and the monstrous” (31) in turn of the century fiction are symptoms of “urban myopia” (35),

¹¹ See for example the work of Charles Kingsley (1873), or Max Nordau (1892).

¹² In Byron and Punter’s *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography* (1999).

suggest that there are other ways to understand the city than as simply a “modern Babylon”.

Henry James, in his preface to *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), evokes the mysterious nature of London, focussing upon the city’s enigmatic character: “Truly, of course, there are London mysteries (dense categories of dark arcana) for every spectator, and it’s in a degree an exclusion and a state of weakness to be without experience of the meaner conditions” (15). James continues by remarking upon the “suggested nearness (to all our apparently ordered life) of some sinister anarchic underworld, heaving in its pain, its power and its hate; a presentation not of sharp particulars, but of loose appearances, vague motions and sounds and symptoms, just perceptible presences and general looming possibilities ...” (28-29) and characterises the city dwellers as “guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what ‘goes on’ irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface” (30).

The tone and imagery of James’s descriptions capture perfectly the ambiguity regarding perceptions of London that this chapter seeks to explore with reference to Machen’s early fiction. On the one hand, James evokes the city of dark labyrinths, unseen horrors and subversive tendencies that is the focus of discussions of the “urban Gothic”. On the other hand, his rubric of a city within a city, an alternative reality below the surface of London highlights not only Machen’s symbolic construction of the city, but the prevailing understandings of social reformers who aimed to investigate this squalid world below the surface in order to understand the reality of urban poverty and crime. Furthermore, James’s depiction of London residents as both fascinated and repulsed by their surroundings, curious but reticent, prefigures the inquisitiveness coupled with worldly urban experience that characterises both Machen’s detectives and the aforementioned social “explorers”. The voyeurism and attention to secret spaces that this characterisation implies along with the conception of the city as a realm that offers both danger and titillation can be seen as clearly in Machen’s psychic detective fiction as in the reports published concerning the conditions of the urban poor such as William

Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), whose descriptions of living conditions depicted violence and veiled sexual immorality.

It is this latter understanding of the city as a site to be explored, a text to be read and interpreted that I believe characterises Machen's urban psychic detective fiction. Not only does it tally more closely with Machen's understanding of the symbolic nature of reality, but unlike Gothic discourses of the anxieties surrounding decadence and degeneration, notions of the urban space as a site of investigation account for the dominance of interpretative rather than horrific scenes in Machen's narratives. Many early critics believed that *The Great God Pan*, *The Inmost Light* and *The Three Impostors* were stylistically flawed as, firstly, they failed to create any real "horror" in their readers, and secondly, the plots hinged unrealistically upon coincidence. However, this is only a flaw if Machen's intent was to generate a visceral response and a typical horrific narrative. If, as this chapter argues, Machen's psychic detective narratives can be understood as part of the author's ongoing investigation into the dualistic nature of reality and the ways in which the material and the spiritual must work together to produce the truth, then the use of coincidence, chance and a detective framework can be seen as part of a larger context of modern understandings of the precarious nature of "knowledge" and an emphasis upon the compatibility of varying ways of knowing.

The flâneur and the detective as social explorer.

The role of the psychic detective in these tales is intimately linked to the figure of the *flâneur*, a mode of experiencing and relating to the urban environment originally discussed by Charles Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" in 1863. Although Baudelaire's *flâneur* was associated with the nineteenth-century Parisian metropolis rather than London, towards the end of the century "*flânerie* ha[d] become emblematic of ... a modern subjectivity shaped by the urban experience" (Horner and Zlosnik 86). According to Keith Tester, whose 1994 examination of the history and

adaptations of the figure, *The Flâneur*, remains the most comprehensive work on the subject; *flânerie* is essentially “the activity of strolling and looking” (1). The *flâneur* is “the secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city” (7); he is an observer of the city and its denizens, and is intimately acquainted with both the well-traversed street and the forgotten byway.

Machen himself is known for his *flâneur*-like association with the city, largely as a result of his work as a journalist. In his 1924 memoir *The London Adventure*, Machen discusses his enthusiasm for what he terms his “London science” (33), reminiscing how he “poked about and mooned about in Soho instead of doing honest work, and speculated as to its narrow alleys and its archways and houses, and its sudden alarms and excursions” (32).

Machen’s psychic detectives such as Villiers and Dyson fit the *flâneur* model as ardent observers of the city but they also move beyond the role of observer in their investigations. As “detectives” they become actively involved in understanding and interpreting events that occur in their environment, a factor that links them to the figure of the social explorer or the social worker. Merlin Coverley also makes the connection between the role of the urban detective and the social scientist, suggesting that

The detective offered a figure whose specialist vision could penetrate the social and criminal mysteries of the city, who could walk its most dangerous streets with impunity, and who could expose truths which would otherwise remain hidden. To this extent, the detective is a surrogate social explorer, enabling readers to confront the ‘fearful contrasts’ of London but with the reassurance of authority and specialist knowledge (*Psychogeography* 118).

Though their status as amateur detectives gives Machen’s investigators very little official authority, their strength lies in their “specialist knowledge” of the ways of the city and, like their counterparts the social explorers, their experience of the out of the way places that were generally hidden from the middle-class gaze. Again, like the social explorers, though the tales of their investigations may be sensational, this is not their primary aim.

Underlying the actions of both the social explorer and the *flâneur*-detective is a desire to know, to understand and interpret their environment and in order to do this they use their training and skills.

The “specialist knowledge” to which Machen’s investigators are privy is an understanding of the function of “coincidence” in the modern world, and more specifically in the urban environment. Coincidence is a relatively common feature of early and mid-Victorian fiction, frequently utilised for purposes of plot convenience in sensational texts, or to provide evidence of the role of providence in human lives. Though it is suggested that “Victorians frequently attributed accident, chance and coincidence – all involving unexpected events – to providence” (*Victorian Conventions* 132), John Reed argues that “[b]y the end of the century it had become difficult to accept notions of providential guidance. Somehow divinity had moved to a greater distance or disappeared altogether” (137). Moreover, “[t]he gradual replacement of Providence by more deterministic views reflected a widespread conviction that man was a prisoner not only of the flesh and of a particular society, but of existence itself, where all coincidences were interchangeable, all happenstance equal to the most careful plan” (141).

Machen argues against this by reinstating the importance of coincidence in the modern world, an approach mirrored in modern scientific discourses that suggested that coincidence and chance are not meaningless, they just need to be understood in the right context. For example, progressive understandings of biological evolution had moved on from the deterministic conceptualisations of mid-century Darwinism towards a more dynamic approach that realised the importance of random events and mutations in the evolution of new species. Similarly physicists and mathematicians had shown the importance of studying randomness, probability and chance, suggesting that what may seem random on the surface may be connected to events at a deeper level, or that someone trained to see potential connections may discern patterns in the apparent chaos.

Machen, discussing this same principle within a more spiritual framework emphasises, “I try to reverence the signs, omens, messages that are delivered in queer

ways and queer places, not in the least according to the plans laid down either by the theologians or the men of science” (*The London Adventure* 14). He goes on to assert that,

It is possible, just dimly possible, that the real pattern and scheme of life is not in the least apparent on the outward surface of things, which is the world of common sense, and rationalism, and reasoned deductions; but rather lurks, half hidden, only apparent in certain rare lights, and then only to the prepared eye; a secret pattern, an ornament which seems to have but little relation or none at all to the obvious scheme of the universe. (21)

It is this ability to interpret the random signs and symbols of the city that constitutes the special knowledge and training of Machen’s amateur psychic detectives. Though they are represented as gentlemen of leisure who undertake investigation as a hobby, they are, in effect, professional *flâneurs* ideally suited to the task of interpreting events in the urban environment. However, this investigation and interpretation occurs on two levels: the material, having to do with physical clues and more traditional detective procedures, and the symbolic, understanding what the clues really mean and how this meaning can be obtained through a skilled reading of seemingly random events.

In their explorations of the hidden parts of the city they share various aspects with the late nineteenth-century social explorers, but where Machen’s psychic detectives differ is not so much in their desire to understand the urban space, or even their investigative methods, since both rely primarily on the “walk and talk” method of gathering data, but in what their investigations ultimately prove. The curiosity of the social explorers is combined with a practical desire to help, to uncover social ills and suggest remedies. In these stories the psychic detectives are motivated more by curiosity than an impulse to help, unlike the social explorers or their counterparts investigating haunted houses in the previous chapter. Though it is possible to make the distinction between the professional social explorers who gathered data and publicised issues and the people, largely volunteers, who ministered to the urban poor on a practical level, this does little to illuminate the real contribution of Machen’s psychic detectives. While they may seem to offer little direct or practical assistance to the individual victims, their focus is on the

bigger picture, their role is to promote the existence of what Machen calls “ecstasy”. They demonstrate that the modern world is not devoid of mystery, symbolism or chance, and that this reality cannot be reached through strict materialism alone. It requires not only close attention to physical reality but the ability to interpret the material world symbolically; a “middle road” between scientific and occult ways of knowing. Like the late nineteenth-century social scientists who argued that social progress could only be achieved when the social environment itself was truly understood, Machen argues that this true understanding of the world can only be achieved through a combination of methodologies.

The remainder of the chapter will discuss three of Machen’s psychic detective narratives, *The Great God Pan*, *The Inmost Light*, and “The Red Hand”, examining the relationship the detectives have with the urban space and their investigative methodologies, highlighting in particular the interaction between the role that coincidence and chance play within the narratives and the detective’s ability to “read” these aspects of urban life, in addition to the more traditional material clues, in order to understand the deeper meaning of events.

The Great God Pan

The Great God Pan (1894) is essentially the exploration of the unintended consequences that accompany an experiment in “transcendental medicine” (1). By performing “a trifling rearrangement of certain cells, a microscopical alteration that would escape the attention of ninety-nine brain specialists out of a hundred” (2), Dr Raymond hopes to enable his patient, his ward Mary, to span “the unthinkable gulf that yawns profound between two worlds, the world of matter and the world of spirit” (3). In the tradition of Greek mythology, Raymond refers to this process of lifting the veil between the two worlds as “seeing the god Pan” (2). On the surface this may seem the kind of aim that a mystic such as Machen would endorse, seeing beyond the veil of the

material world to the realm of spirit beneath. However, it is Raymond's approach and attitude towards the experiment that differentiate him from occultists such as Machen's friend Arthur Waite.

For the trained Initiate a foray into the spirit world is intricately prepared for according to the tradition of his practice and only attempted when a specific level of accomplishment is achieved. It is not to be undertaken lightly and the Initiate is a voluntary participant in the event, well aware of the risks he may be exposed to. In *The Great God Pan*, Raymond performs his experiment on a naïve young woman who has no idea what to expect. His callous assertion that "I rescued Mary from the gutter, and from almost certain starvation, when she was a child; I think her life is mine, to use as I see fit" (4) indicates not only his contempt for human life but his intention to place scientific experimentation above all moral or ethical considerations. It is this type of scientific arrogance that Machen abhorred. Moreover, Raymond's assumption that understanding the other world could be a matter of simple surgery demonstrates a materialistic worldview that denies the essence of the very spiritual world he is attempting to connect with. Though Raymond's experiment is ultimately successful in that Mary does seem to see into a world beyond, her experience is depicted as terrifying:

Suddenly, as they watched, they heard a long-drawn sigh, and suddenly did the colour that had vanished returned to the girl's cheeks, and suddenly her eyes opened. ... [A] great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch what was invisible; but in an instant the wonder faded, and gave place to the most awful terror. The muscles of her face were hideously convulsed, she shook from head to foot; the soul seemed struggling and shuddering within the house of flesh. (7)

Mary is left brain-damaged and, surprisingly, pregnant. In due course she dies giving birth to a daughter who is subsequently fostered out to a family in the country.

If this were all there was to Machen's novel then it would be a relatively simple horrific tale about the consequences of science meddling with things it doesn't fully understand. This is the way it is usually understood in Gothic criticism. For example, in

her discussion of the figure of the scientist in nineteenth-century fiction, Roslynn Haynes¹³ suggests that

we search in vain for more than a very few examples of sympathetically-presented scientist characters in Victorian literature. ... Instead, we have numerous representations of the figure of the mad, evil and dangerous scientist, conceived in the tradition of Faust and Frankenstein and often presented in frankly derivative gothic terms. These characters are not realistically depicted. Rather they are a metonym for science itself ... The fear of the new secular power of science in conflict with religion and individual aspirations – a fear which could not be discussed within the parameters of actual science - is transferred to an evil mage figure who overthrows the social and moral order. ... They act by imposing their mysterious, almost superhuman, power on the innocent, invariably with evil consequences. (120)

Dr Raymond certainly fits the evil scientist model, and his experiment does have horrific consequences, but Machen's narrative does not end with Raymond's failure. It is merely the first chapter in a string of events, the true nature of which is revealed by piecing together seemingly unconnected narratives and evidence gathered by chance.

The majority of *The Great God Pan* focuses on the investigation into the actions of Mary's daughter Helen by a series of psychic detectives. They trace her movements, beginning with the atrocities she committed in the countryside where she spent her youth, to her current residence in London. The detective narrative is told through a series of letters, fragments and oral histories pieced together by Clarke, Villiers and Austin, who are motivated by their curiosity to discover all the details they can pertaining to the life of this mysterious woman. Though they uncover various crimes she has committed, the reader is never given many details regarding the true nature of her actions or what her victims really suffered. At these points the narrative trails away into the hyperbole regarding "nameless terrors" and "unspeakable horrors" that was so criticised by contemporary reviewers. While it is true that this technique fails to rouse any real sense

of horror in the reader, what it does accomplish is maintaining focus upon the actions of the detectives and the current aspect of their investigation. The reader is drawn into the investigative process rather than focussing on the visceral aspects of the crimes themselves. This narrative technique is typical of detective fiction more generally¹³ and highlights the problem of understanding *The Great God Pan* within a purely Gothic framework.

As a tale of supernatural horror it has little to recommend it after the first chapter. There is not sufficient characterisation of the victims to feel any real sympathy for them, the details of the crimes are sketchy at best and nothing “horrific” actually happens in the present. All events are discussed in retrospect and information is usually second hand. However, as a psychic detective narrative *The Great God Pan* is quite successful. The three detectives are carefully characterised and their investigative process is discussed in detail. The remainder of this section will focus on these aspects of Machen’s novel, demonstrating how the *flâneur*-detectives make good use of physical clues, largely gathered through coincidence and chance, to get to the bottom of the mystery surrounding Helen Vaughan.

Following the description of Dr. Raymond’s experiment, the narrative skips forward a little over twenty years to the present, where Clarke, the man who witnessed the surgery, is reading over his correspondence. His interest in “all the more recondite and esoteric elements in the nature of men” (8) was the reason he was invited to witness Raymond’s experiment, and although he was troubled by what he saw, his curiosity gradually returned and Clarke resumed his investigations into the unseen world. Clarke is involved in compiling a book entitled “Memoirs to Prove the Existence of the Devil” (9) and has just finished recording an unusual story told to him by an acquaintance regarding the actions of an adopted child who, eleven years ago, terrified her neighbours and induced madness in her playmates. A certain dramatic irony surrounds this episode as an

¹³ See for example the way that point of view and narrative voice are used in Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories to keep the reader’s focus firmly on the investigative process, in contrast to the extensive descriptive passages concerning the victim or witnesses experiences in Sensation novels or Gothic romances.

astute reader would realise from the hints provided about the early childhood of the orphan that she was the daughter of Mary, raised by Raymond until he could no longer control her behaviour. That the earliest history of Mary's child should happen to be given to the one man who could possibly realise the true import of the story is the first of many meaningful coincidences on which the narrative hinges.

As the point of view shifts with the beginning of each chapter, the reader temporarily leaves behind the narrative of Raymond and the story of the child Helen V. to join Clarke's friend Villiers, an idle, urban gentleman, in his nightly ramble through the streets of London.

Villiers prided himself as a practised explorer of such obscure mazes and byways of London life, and in this unprofitable pursuit he displayed an assiduity which was worthy of more serious employment. Thus he stood beside the lamp-post surveying the passers-by with undisguised curiosity, and with that gravity only known to the systematic diner, had just enunciated in his mind the formula: "London has been called the City of Encounters; it is more than that, it is the City of Resurrections" (14)

During his *flânerie* Villiers encounters an old college friend, Herbert, begging in the street. He relates how he has been reduced to this condition through an unfortunate marriage to a young woman who corrupted his soul:

The night of the wedding I found myself sitting in her bedroom in the hotel, listening to her as she spoke in her beautiful voice, spoke of things which even now I would not dare whisper in blackest night, though I stood in the midst of a wilderness. You, Villiers, you may think you know life, and London, and what goes on day and night in this dreadful city; for all I can say you may have heard the talk of the vilest, but I tell you you can have no conception of what I know, not in your most fantastic, hideous dreams can you have imagined forth the faintest shadow of what I have heard – and seen. Yes, seen. I have seen the incredible, such horrors that even I myself sometimes stop in the middle of the street, and ask whether it is possible for a man to behold such things and live. In a year, Villiers, I was a ruined man, in body and soul. (16)

When Herbert mentions that the name of the woman to whom he had been married was Helen Vaughan, the reader realises that another episode in the history of the mysterious Helen has been revealed as a result of a chance encounter. Though at this stage the name means nothing to him, Villiers feels “together with compassion all the relish of the amateur in mysteries (15). His curiosity aroused, he senses that “A case like this is like a nest of Chinese boxes; you open one after another and find a quainter workmanship in every box. Most likely poor Herbert is merely one of the outside boxes; there are stranger ones to follow” (17).

Villiers takes his story to Austin, a fellow *flâneur* who recalls a scandal associated with Herbert being published in all the London papers: a well-connected gentleman reportedly died of fright after visiting Herbert and his wife. Villiers investigates the scene of the crime and discovers among the mess a pen and ink sketch of a woman, which he takes to show Clarke. Clarke is horrified to see what he believes to be Mary’s face staring back at him, but soon realises there are some subtle differences around the eyes. It is only when he turns the image over and sees “Helen” written on the back that he realises the truth, and makes the connection between the surgery he witnessed, the story of the child and the portrait of the woman responsible for the ruination of Herbert’s soul. At this point all of the chance encounters and coincidences, together with the material evidence (letters and sketches) that have driven the narrative come together to reveal to both Clarke and the reader the truth behind the mysterious events that have been hinted at: Mary’s child, conceived in a vision of Pan, is alive, and wherever she goes, horrible events follow. Next Austin, an art collector, acquires a book of paintings by Arthur Meyrick who died mysteriously on a trip to South America. Inside they discover another portrait of Helen, this time surrounded by mythological figures of evil. Thus another chapter in her history is uncovered through the discovery of a physical clue, when the detectives have no real leads to follow.

Machen’s amateur psychic detectives rely on chance and random events to lead them inexorably to a greater understanding of the case. This is not ineptitude or laziness

on the detectives' part; rather, their knowledge of the workings of the urban environment have taught them that the city is truly a mystical place in which random, yet meaningful events are in fact commonplace. As the narrative thus far has demonstrated, the man of the street is continually running into old friends in unexpected places, finding answers to unasked questions and fortuitously encountering just the person about whom they were thinking. This is the very nature of the urban environment. As late nineteenth-century scientists were beginning to discover, when enough autonomous entities interact, unexpected patterns often emerge. These patterns are what the urban detectives understand. They realise that meaning can emerge from seeming chaos when the observer is able to gain the right perspective. Thus the urban space is a text that must be read, its symbols interpreted by the expert who is able to piece together the physical and metaphysical clues that can be discovered in the ever-changing current of the city.

The discovery of Meyrick's painting signals the point at which Machen's narrative changes from the idle investigation of past events into a more urgent quest. A number of respected London gentlemen have committed suicide, some of whom were friends of the three investigators, and the police and their families are at a loss to find a reason for their actions. "The police had been forced to confess themselves powerless to arrest or to explain the sordid murders of Whitechapel; but before the horrible suicides of Piccadilly and Mayfair they were dumbfounded, for not even the mere ferocity which did duty as an explanation of the crimes of the East End, could be of service in the West" (33). In this reference to the murders of Jack the Ripper some five years earlier, Machen emphasises the upper-middle class nature of Helen's current victims and the investigators themselves. The East End, the site of the Ripper murders and also the part of the city most associated with poverty, crime and prostitution, was also the site most commonly investigated by social explorers. It is to this quarter that Villiers now turns to investigate the current whereabouts of Helen, whom they suspect to be behind this latest series of mysterious deaths.

Villiers eventually encounters Helen in Soho. "If you see mud on the top of a stream, you may be sure that it was once on the bottom. I went to the bottom. I have

always been fond of diving into Queer Street for my amusement, and I found that my knowledge of that locality and its inhabitants very useful” (40). In this way Villiers demonstrates that he knows how to use the random events that typify the urban space to his advantage. He places himself in their way, going to the place most likely to yield up a fortuitous coincidence, and remaining open to the currents of the city. The detective finds that Helen had been masquerading as a Mrs Beaumont, the new darling of London society, terrorising the men who attended her “at-homes” or, as Susan Navarette eloquently states: “amusing herself by introducing her male friends to her father” (189).

Helen’s association with the God Pan is hinted at throughout the novel. Her mother, Mary, presumably fell pregnant during her brief encounter with the God, and during her childhood she terrified her playmates by cavorting with satyrs. Meyrick depicts her in a similar fashion, surrounded by dark mythological figures. Pan was a popular figure in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction¹⁴ and embodied a variety of meanings depending on the genre of the piece, ranging from the inspiring nature god of pastoral poetry and vignettes to the destructive “panic” inducing force of supernatural fiction. The Victorian literary representations reveal the dual nature of Pan, a God traditionally symbolising the crossing of boundaries between human and animal, mortal and divine as a result of his parentage. A God of binaries, he represents the beauty of nature and music as well as the destruction and grotesquery of the rites of Dionysus or the Bacchanal. In Machen’s novel Pan represents the power of the unseen world, that which cannot be understood on the material plane and, more importantly that which should not be tampered with by the uninitiated. While Pan is primarily a nature God, Machen emphasises the darker, more primal aspects of his mythology, elements that can be transferred to a modern setting,

it is an old story, an old mystery played in our day, and in dim London streets instead of amidst the vineyards and the olive gardens. We know what happened to those who chanced to meet the Great God Pan, and

¹⁴ See for example E. M. Forster’s “The Story of a Panic” (1904), E. F. Benson’s “The Man Who Went Too Far” (1904) which is discussed more fully in the following chapter, Saki’s “The Music on the Hill” (1911), Algernon Blackwood’s “The Man Whom the Trees Loved” (1912) and later in the century Dion Fortune’s *The Goat-Foot God* (1936).

those who are wise to know that all the symbols are symbols of something, not of nothing. It was, indeed an exquisite symbol beneath which men long ago veiled their knowledge of the most awful, most secret forces which lie at the heart of all things; forces before which lie at the heart of all things; forces before which the souls of men must wither and die and blacken, as their bodies blacken under the electric current. Such forces cannot be named, cannot be spoken, cannot be imagined except under a veil and a symbol, a symbol to the most of us appearing a quaint poetic fancy, to some a foolish tale. But you and I, at all events have known something of the terror that may dwell in the secret place of life, manifested under human flesh; that which is without form taking to itself a form. (43)

Pan is both an actual figure and a symbol in this novel. He is the Goat God that terrifies and impregnates Mary but he is also a symbol of the forces of the other world that the ancient mystery religions of Greece and contemporary occultists sought to understand. Though his nature in this text is terrifying, this too may be a symbol of forbidden knowledge or an inappropriate approach to the mysteries rather than the specific nature of the God himself. This ambiguity is what makes the symbolic approach to Machen's work all the more interesting since it provides us with various ways of approaching the text that do not narrow its conceptual framework to simply anxiety concerning the potential evils of science or materialism.

The novel ends with Helen's death. Having finally tracked her to a house in Piccadilly, Villiers, Clarke and an independent witness, a medical man by the name of Robert Matheson, watch her commit suicide. Later the doctor reports,

I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being ... and at last I saw nothing but a substance as jelly. (46)

Thus, by following a trail of physical clues and the pattern of coincidence, the three investigators are able to piece together the sordid history of Helen Vaughan and stop her from committing any further atrocities. Though the detectives are not especially experienced in conducting criminal investigations they are very familiar with the city and

how to obtain information within it. The initial pieces of information are acquired fortuitously but, once the detectives sense that there is a mystery to be uncovered, they (like the social explorers) actively seek out the dark places of the city in search of clues that will enable them to offer assistance. They do not ignore the accidents and coincidences that occur daily in the city; instead they trust that in the “city of encounters” the solution to the mystery will be offered to the man who is willing to seek meaning in both the physical and symbolic realms, exemplifying the view of the “new sciences” and occultism alike.

This story never really succeeds in creating anxiety. As a “tale of terror” it fails to arouse the reader’s visceral responses, but as a psychic detective narrative it questions the way we understand the tension between the scientific and the spiritual in the modern world. Dr Raymond’s experiment seeks to “know the unknowable”. The horrific consequences are a result of Raymond’s arrogance in treating the spiritual or mystical phenomena in a purely materialistic manner. The psychic detectives succeed where Raymond fails by realising that material reality is only one aspect of the bigger picture. Again like the social explorers and social scientists concerned with stamping out the “evils” of poverty and crime, the psychic detectives become experts in understanding the urban space in all its facets: the dark, the mysterious and the seemingly irrational. It is only by meeting the city *on its own terms* they are able to make progress.

Though the ideas raised in this analysis such as the nature of evil, the reality of the other world, its perception through symbolism and coincidence and the consequences of materialism, are not fully worked out in *The Great God Pan*, they are continuing themes in Machen’s work, and different texts examine alternative aspects of these questions. In this, the first of his novels, Machen introduces the ideas that are developed further in his subsequent work: the dual nature of reality, the possibility of experiencing the spiritual through symbolism, and the important role that chance and coincidence play in attaining an understanding of the modern world. These themes are also the focus of *The Inmost Light*, the companion story published with the 1894 edition of *The Great God Pan*. The importance of this story lies in the introduction of the character of Dyson, who

features in both *The Three Impostors*, “The Red Hand”, and future stories concerning the “fairies”, and in the further elaboration of Machen’s theories of the necessity of combining the physical with the symbolic in order to truly understand the world.

The Inmost Light

The Inmost Light is much shorter than *The Great God Pan* and is based upon a very similar premise. Dr Black, obsessed with “curious and obscure branches of knowledge” (74), “knowledge of which the very existence is a profound secret to most men” (75), performs a surgical experiment upon his wife. The object of the experiment is to remove the human soul and to observe “the horror more awful than the horror of death itself” (76) that would enter the body in its place. Like Raymond, Black experiments on an innocent woman who suffers for his scientific curiosity. However, it seems Black was aware that the result of his experiment would mean the death of his wife and the presence of something terrible in her place. He values his scientific curiosity above her life and soul. Dyson, the *flâneur*-detective, accidentally glimpses what remains of Mrs Black through a suburban window, and the story details his investigation into the matter and his desire to know the truth behind what he saw. Even more so than *The Great God Pan*, this story is first and foremost an exploration of urban mystery. The dialogue between Dyson and Salisbury regarding the nature of the city, and Salisbury’s education into the ways of meaningful coincidence tend to overshadow the focus on Black’s story, rendering the tone of the narrative one of intellectual inquiry and problem solving rather than any real sense of horror, anxiety or disgust. In fact, it is possible to almost lose sight of the experiment altogether in the play of coincidence and descriptions of London that form the basis of Dyson and Salisbury’s interactions.

Unlike *The Great God Pan*, which opens with a description of the experiment and its consequences, the narrative order is rearranged in *The Inmost Light* so that it is the detective, Dyson, who is the firm focus of the story. The narrative begins with Dyson

running into an old friend, Salisbury, during one of his urban rambles. He explains to Salisbury how he occupies his time devoted to the study of “[t]he science of the great city; the physiology of London; literally and metaphysically the greatest subject that the mind of man can conceive” (52), and admits his fascination with the mysteries and layers of the urban space:

I feel sometimes positively overwhelmed with the thought of the vastness and complexity of London. Paris a man may get to understand thoroughly with a reasonable amount of study; but London is always a mystery. ... You may point out a street, correctly enough, as the abode of washerwomen; but, in that second floor, a man may be studying Chaldee roots, and in the garret over the way a forgotten artist is dying by inches. (53)

When Salisbury argues in response that Dyson is “misled by a too fervid imagination; the mystery of London exists only in your fancy. It seems to me a dull place enough” (53), Dyson begins to tell him of the investigation he is currently absorbed in, the mystery of the woman in the window. By ordering and arranging the narrative in this manner, Machen makes Dyson’s study of London the focus of the story rather than the details of the particular mystery, which are gradually revealed as part of his ongoing dialogue with Salisbury regarding the nature of the city. Black’s experiment becomes just one example of the myriad mysteries of London, an aspect that is emphasised by the recurring nature of Dyson’s character in Machen’s mystery stories.

Machen simplifies the characterisation from *The Great God Pan* by having only two psychic detectives, in this case Dyson and Salisbury, gather evidence. Not only does this enable the narrative to move more quickly, it establishes a key technique that would characterise the majority of Machen’s later mystery fiction: the interplay of two, initially different, perspectives regarding the nature of mystery, and their gradual alignment over the course of the investigation. In *The Inmost Light* it is Salisbury who plays the part of unimaginative materialist (a role that would later be taken over by Dyson’s partner Phillipps in *The Three Impostors* and “The Red hand”). He declares London to be the most ordinary of places, and is described as “a young gentleman of a particularly solid

form of intellect, coy and retiring before the mysterious and uncommon, with a constitutional dislike of paradox” (58). He believes Dyson’s story to be “a strange tissue of improbabilities strung together with the ingenuity of a born meddler in plots and mysteries” (58). Indeed Dyson does characterise himself as “the Wellington of mysteries” (71), and is pleased to discover that his friend, almost against his will, begins to be drawn into the mystery of the woman in the window.

By chance, Salisbury witnesses a domestic dispute in an alley near his home. The woman throws away a piece of paper in anger, something to do with an errand she now refuses to run, which Salisbury later collects though “he could not for the life of him have explained the importance he attached to what was in all probability mere rubbish” (61). The paper reveals a cryptic message: “Q. has had to go and see his friends in Paris” ... “Traverse Handel S. ‘Once around the grass, and twice around the lass, and thrice around the maple tree’” (62), and Salisbury, disgusted by his own interest in such trivial nonsense, laughs off the event. Later, discussing his chance encounter (and his inability to get the strange rhyme out of his head) with Dyson, Salisbury presses his friend to continue with the story of his investigation into the Blacks.

Hearing of the woman’s death, and the odd findings at her autopsy (she had “the brain of a devil ... and I have no doubt that Black found some way of putting an end to it” [65]), Dyson had made up his mind to track down Mr Black who had subsequently disappeared. Once again it is chance that enables the investigation:

It was a chance if he were ever heard of again, and it was by a mere chance that I came across him at last. I was walking one day along Gray’s Inn Road, not bound for anywhere in particular, but looking about me, as usual, ... when I noticed a man walking in front of me[.] ... There was something about his look that made me curious, I don’t know why, and I began to walk briskly with the idea of overtaking him, when on a sudden his hat blew off and came bounding along the pavement to my feet. (66)

Dyson is able to make Black's acquaintance, and insinuates himself into the doctor's life, but Black soon falls ill and dies and Dyson is unable to continue his investigation, his trail having turned cold. "*Explicit*, my tale is ended, and you see that though I knew Black, I know nothing of his wife or of the history of her death" (69). However, like the detectives in the previous story, Dyson subsequently turns to his knowledge of the role of random events in the city.

Taking up the discarded note that Salisbury had acquired, Dyson takes a walk and fortuitously finds himself in the vicinity of Handel Street. With "a sharp pang, the pang of one who has made a discovery" (72) the detective notices an antique shop named "Travers". Dyson strolls confidently into the store, recites the rhyme from the note, and blusters his way into receiving the package that was obviously meant to be collected by someone else. Upon inspection the parcel reveals a handwritten manuscript and a small wooden box containing

the most splendid jewel, a jewel such as Dyson had never dreamed of, and within it shon the blue of far skies, and the green of the sea by the shore, and the red of the ruby, and deep violet rays, and in the middle of it all seemed aflame as if a fountain of fire rose up, and fell, and rose again with sparks like stars for drops. (73-4)

The manuscript, written by Dr. Black, explains the process of the experiment that turned his wife's soul into the opal now held in Dyson's hand. Aghast, Dyson destroys the jewel, releasing a spiral of yellow smoke, presumably Mrs Black's soul.

Like *The Great God Pan*, *The Inmost Light* is concerned with a man who attempts to understand the Other World through scientific means. It would be untrue to say that the experiment has unintended consequences for, although Mrs Black is depicted as "horrific", her condition is exactly what her husband expected. The matter-of-fact way in which this story is told is perhaps even more terrifying than the tales of Helen's exploits in the previous text. Once again the detectives really only come in at the close of the narrative, unable to prevent the experiments. However through their expertise they are able to prevent further atrocities from occurring. In *The Great God Pan* Helen is

destroyed and in this story the woman's soul is released. That arrangements were made for its collection suggest that it may have been destined for use in further "experiments" and thus Dyson's interception of the exchange prevents this from taking place. By understanding the events that led up to the situation, and being able to interpret the signs of the city that lead him to the right place at the right time, Dyson solves the mystery and, in the process begins to teach Salisbury how to read the city. The juxtaposition between Salisbury's disregard of the wonders of the city, and the messages revealed by his coincidental encounters, and Dyson's openness to the same, demonstrate the latter's superior position. This method of comparison is a particular feature of the relationship between Dyson and Phillipps who feature together in both *The Three Impostors* and "The Red Hand". Though "The Red Hand" has a different narrative premise than the previous two stories, it is concerned with uncovering the truth behind some hidden treasure rather than the experiment of an "evil scientist", the methods used by Dyson in this story centre upon the calculated use of chance and the manipulation of probability.

"The Red Hand"¹⁵

Engaged in the process of analysing and dating a number of prehistoric fish-hooks that have come into his possession, the ethnologist Phillipps is interrupted by his friend Dyson who proceeds to needle him regarding his work, suggesting that such archaeological artefacts are not the only way to study primitive man. Dyson goes on to suggest that the primitive may be encountered "in this whirling and mysterious city" for "who can limit the age of survival? The troglodyte and the lake-dweller, perhaps representatives of yet darker races, may very probably be lurking in our midst, rubbing shoulders with frock-coated and finely-draped humanity." (2) To prove his point Dyson suggests an evening walk, their aim being to see if they can "catch a troglodyte" as proof. They are shocked by the discovery of the body of a man who has been murdered not long previously, the body being identified as that of prominent London surgeon, Sir Thomas Vivian. Some strange clues are found at the site: a primitive flint knife that appears to be

¹⁵ "The Red Hand" was written during 1895 and published in December in *Chapman's Magazine*.

the murder weapon, a letter in a strange script full of celestial references, and a red hand in an unusual position painted on the wall of the almost completely dark alley. Intrigued by the situation they continue to investigate the case unofficially, aided by a friendly policeman who provides them with a copy of the evidence, willing to humour their amateur policing.

The detectives start work by trying to discover the hidden meanings of the physical clues found near the body. Using his background in ethnology, the “red hand” which gives the story its title, found chalked on the wall above the body, is soon identified by Phillipps as the *mano in fica*, a symbol of the “evil-eye” commonly used in Italy. He is also able to determine the approximate age of the flint knife, and its probable source. His explanation of the murder is simple: “Vivian must have been mixed up at some period of his life in an adventure of a not very creditable description, and that he was murdered out of revenge by some Italian whom he had wronged.” (7) As for the prehistoric murder weapon, Phillipps is certain “[t]he man found the thing in Italy, or possibly stole it from some museum” (7). He proudly lays his theory before Dyson, boasting: “[f]ollow the line of least resistance, my dear fellow, and you will see there is no need to bring up primitive man from his secular grave beneath the hills.” (7)

Dyson, however, is not convinced by Phillipps’s theory. “As I understand you, then, you think that your Italian, having murdered Vivian, kindly chalked up that hand as a guide to Scotland Yard?” (8) Dyson too pays close attention to the material evidence but interprets it from a different perspective. Instead of focussing on ethnological and sociological interpretations such as Phillipps’s assurance that “a murderer is always a madman ... he likes to leave his mark, as it were, upon his handiwork” (8), Dyson questions the circumstances by which the symbol came to be written on the wall above the body, wondering at the fact that it was written in a dark alley without any mistakes or false-starts. His theory, that it was drawn earlier in the evening, before the murder, or else by someone with very good night vision, hints towards the existence of an alternative explanation. Similarly, the coded letter found in the murdered man’s pockets which tells of a missing “black heaven” is of more interest to Dyson who sees it as yet another veiled

mystery, than to Phillipps who proclaims it “mere gibberish” (10). Dyson is less quick to dismiss evidence that at first glance may not “fit” the logical assumptions: “There must be purpose under all this, and to my mind there is something hidden under the circumstances of this case[.] ... I cannot do as you do, and fortify myself with cast-iron propositions” (10).

This emphasis upon the problematic nature of “cast-iron propositions” again reflects the utility of combining various ways of knowing, and the tendency in late nineteenth-century culture towards the questioning of strict materialism and the criticism of dogmatic approaches of any kind. As Soffer points out, “[t]he liberating discovery of the new social scientists was that in the new genetic and physical sciences an acceptance of the tentativeness of all knowledge was replacing positivistic aspirations to certainty” (9). That “certainty” cannot be based upon purely materialistic notions is a recurring theme in Machen’s fiction but, like the new social scientists, in these stories he also suggests that the world is open to interpretation and that the “tentativeness of all knowledge” actually provides an opportunity for discovery rather than a reason for anxiety.

Dyson uses the same material evidence as Phillipps, but where Phillipps believes the clues reveal the truth, Dyson sees the material clues as a building block for understanding the larger truth that must be got at by a different means. In other words, Phillipps sees the evidence as “facts” upon which he can build a theory; Dyson views the material clues as symbolic of a deeper meaning that can only be understood through a synthesis of approaches. He sees the clues gathered as “diverse and variegated threads joined to weave ... a strange and shadowy picture, with ghastly shapes dominant and deadly, and yet ill-defined, like the giant figures wavering in an ancient tapestry” (11).

In an effort to gather more pieces of the puzzle, Dyson “puts his trust” in his theory of “improbability”, a rather original investigative methodology that he seems to have invented himself. At the core of this method is the idea that if you are looking for the occurrence of an unusual or improbable event, then the longer you look for it the

more likely you are to see it. Using this imaginative approach Dyson discovers and obtains the “black heaven” by the singular method of frequenting bars and pawnbrokers until something that might reasonably fit the description of the lost item turns up (in this case a drunken woman hurls it in fury at the head of a publican who refuses to serve her). The “black heaven” turns out to be an ancient tablet bearing a strange inscription that Dyson, unfamiliar with ancient languages and symbols, takes to Phillipps who will “undertake to decipher anything,” having developed “thirty-seven rules for the solution of inscriptions” (15). This event in itself serves to highlight the difference between Dyson and Phillipps. The latter is systematic, logical and unimaginative; he sees the artefact and assumes they can be classified. Compare this to Dyson’s approach towards obtaining the artefact in the first place. His “theory of improbability” seems haphazard and illogical, yet it is his approach that ultimately yields results.

After a week of ceaseless attempts, Phillipps must admit to having “completely failed” in his attempt to decipher the inscription after having “tried every known device in vain” even to the extent of submitting it “to a friend at the Museum, ... a man of prime authority on the subject” (15). He is forced to admit that even he is starting to suspect something from “another world than ours” may be behind the mystery: “I am not a superstitious man, Dyson, and you know that I have no truck with even the noble delusions, but I confess I yearn to be rid of this small square of blackish stone ... it seems to me troglodytic and abhorred” (15). Here Phillipps begins to merge notions of the ethnological with the esoteric with his description of the artefact as both “troglodytic”, referring to cave-dwelling prehistoric peoples (a scientific notion), and “abhorred”, a sense of horror in the object’s presence (an imaginative, irrational response).

Once again employing his theory of improbability, Dyson is able to locate the rightful owner of the “black heaven” (who is also assumed to be Vivian’s murderer) by paying a street artist to draw the symbol of the red hand on the pavement outside his window. For days Dyson patiently watches the foot traffic seeking a man who shows his recognition of the symbol, and is eventually rewarded by making the acquaintance of Mr Selby, who agrees to tell his story (somewhat in awe of Dyson’s apparently occult

powers of detection). As a youth Selby lived in a remote part of Wales and found among the hills a strange stone covered in mysterious swirls and characters (the “black heaven”). Believing the tablet to be a kind of “treasure map” to the hoards of an extinct race, Selby devoted his life to deciphering the “map”. After moving to London he and the murdered surgeon Vivian lived together as poor students and the two young men worked together, unsuccessfully, on the solution to the puzzle until a change in Vivian’s fortunes enabled him to move on in the world. The two had not spoken in many years, and when Selby finally managed to decipher the tablet and verify the location of the treasure he decided to keep his youthful promise to Vivian and share the loot with his old friend and assistant. Bringing back with him an ancient flint knife to prove what he had found, Selby wrote to Vivian in a code they had devised as students, telling him of his discovery and requesting a meeting. Vivian suggested they meet in an out-of-the-way alley they once frequently passed, and after hearing Selby’s story, during which he draws on the wall one of the symbols etched upon the stone as a means of explanation (a red hand), and seeing his “proof”, Vivian attacks his former-friend who is forced in consequence to defend himself with the only weapon he had to hand, namely the ancient flint knife. Thus the clues found at the scene are explained.

From Selby’s tale we learn much of his own investigative methodology, which hinges upon “sheer accident” (21) and ideas that “flashed into my brain in a moment” (23), offering him the key to decrypting the symbols of the “black heaven”. He relies chiefly on inspiration and luck. To the casual reader this would seem remarkable similar to Dyson’s “improbability” theory. However at the end of Selby’s story, the detective reveals that he had a few other material clues on which to lay his “trap”, such as a probable address and a map determining the route between this address and the scene of the murder (based, it must be said, on a passage deciphered from De Quincey!). Thus Dyson reveals his difference from the more purely happenstance approach of Selby: he relies just as much on physical evidence as Phillipps, but it is in his understanding of such evidence as symbolic of deeper meanings rather than as unquestionable fact that Dyson distinguishes himself as a psychic detective.

Almost as an aside, Selby proceeds to explain that he then returned to the place of treasure but only managed to bring back with him a small, gold image depicting “revolting obscenities” he refers to as the “Pain of the Goat” (28).¹⁶ When the curious detectives question why he did not bring more, Selby becomes frightened and admits “[b]ecause the keepers are still there, and I saw them [...] those who live are little higher than beasts, and [...] what you have seen [on the gold image] is surpassed a thousandfold” (28). The story ends on this note, and Machen’s readers along with the detectives, are left to digest what they have been told about the continued existence of the fairies.

In each of the texts examined in this chapter, Machen explores a method of investigation based upon a dual understanding of regular, physical clues and a more complex notion of the role of chance and random events. Given the author’s interest in symbolism and occultism this emphasis upon interpreting the unseen and deducing patterns out of seeming chaos may not be surprising. However what is generally overlooked by critics of Machen’s work, particularly those focussed on the Gothic aspects of his narratives, is the ways in which this preoccupation with interpretation is also a significant feature of turn of the century social science and the “new sciences”. Social scientists and social explorers, keen to bring progress to the East End and other poverty and crime-stricken areas of London, were primarily involved in attempting to understand the principles and factors that guided these urban spaces. It was assumed that if the situation was properly understood it could therefore be rectified. Similarly many of the “new sciences” focussed upon random events, sudden mutation and the principles of probability, and theorised that patterns could be discerned if only the observer knew where, and how, to look. Machen’s detectives embody these principles in their investigative methodologies, employing their unique and minute understanding of the city and its people along with an innate sense of how random and chance events assume meaning in a space that teems with chaotic life. Machen’s own belief in the importance of signs and symbols suggests a dual approach to reality in which the physical and the metaphysical combine to create true meaning.

¹⁶ Probably a reference to Bacchic rituals associated with the worship of Pan.

Though *The Great God Pan* and *The Inmost Light* are concerned with “evil scientists” who create disastrous consequences through their desire to explain the mysteries of reality in merely materialistic terms, Machen’s work is not straightforwardly anti-materialistic or anti-scientific. It is the arrogance of assuming that a materialistic worldview can explain all there is to know that Machen rejects. Through the example of his psychic detectives, Machen demonstrates the importance of interpreting the world in a symbolic manner, as it is only through this approach that reality can truly be understood. This is not to take away from the importance of the physical, material world (and the more traditional clues that the detectives uncover), but true reality cannot be apprehended in this way alone. Thus in these texts Machen moves away from earlier nineteenth century perceptions of science as revealing the ultimate truth of the universe, towards a recognition, common in both progressive and occult circles towards the end of the century, that understanding (and progress) cannot be assured through science alone.

In the next chapter the issue of “progress” and the conditions necessary to achieve it, is discussed further. In particular, the relationship between “civilisation” and the “primitive” is explored in the contexts of the increasingly popular studies of anthropology and ethnology. The possibility that “progress” may, somewhat paradoxically, depend on recapturing a more “primitive” approach to the world is the focus of the psychic detective narratives examined.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRIMITIVES, PAGANS AND PROGRESS

The previous chapters have explored the ways in which Gothic criticism privileges notions of anxiety within discussions of both domestic and urban spaces, and how psychic detective texts can be understood as moving beyond this discourse to explore more progressive possibilities. In the texts discussed so far, amateur psychic detectives explore the potential for resolution offered by the transcending or blurring of boundaries, bridging the gap between the past and the present, the methodologies of the new sciences and social sciences (such as the importance of random events and the benefits of social exploration) and the possibility of symbolic rather than purely materialistic ways of “knowing”. In their “cases” these psychic detectives offer solutions to supernatural problems that reveal an alternative side of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century culture, a side that is often neglected by traditional Gothic scholarship. At this time there was considerable interest in finding new ways of ensuring social progress, which was no longer considered an inevitable force. New scientific methodologies advocated the combining of disciplines and knowledge forms to create new perspectives on old problems and this, coupled with a realisation that empirical science, once believed to possess all the answers, may only be one part of the puzzle, led to a feeling of liberation, potential and excitement in intellectual circles and wider British culture. It is this sense of possibility, the opportunity for learning, advancement and new understandings that is embodied by the psychic detectives. In the texts examined in this chapter, the amateur psychic detectives explore the very notion of “progress” in a social and spiritual sense, through their exploration of “survivals”, “primitive” forces and ancient beliefs. They confront aspects of the “primitive” past that become manifest in the modern world and must come to terms with the role that the past plays within the present, and what this might mean for the future.

In this chapter the site of investigation shifts from domestic and urban spaces to the British countryside, a location considered at once more “primitive” and spiritual than the city. Conceptually these two sites, the city and the country, are closely linked as, from

the eighteenth century, ideas of the “rural” were constructed in relation and opposition to understandings of the modern, industrialised city. The Romantic notion of the rural idyll continued through the nineteenth-century; pastoral literature and “country writing” offering readers a critique of urban life, if not explicitly then implicitly through the mode of comparison with the simplicity and wholesomeness of rural life. The notion of rural people as hearty, healthy and sporting is in direct contrast to the “degenerate” stock inhabiting the city. In contrast to the urban space as a site of enclosure, pressure, competition and conformity, the country came to be seen in terms of freedom, liberation and escape and thus the countryside can be understood as a place of retreat for the restoration of body and spirit.¹

From an alternative perspective, the freedom that such natural surroundings offer can also be associated with “primitive” pre-industrial societies and their beliefs. Gothic criticism has focussed on this aspect in its discussion of the anxiety surrounding the possibilities of de-evolution and degeneration, suggesting that supernatural narratives that feature survivals of older peoples and beliefs represent to modern man the fear of a “return to the primitive”, a reversion to an earlier state brought about by the lack of civilising influences in wild, natural spaces. David Punter, for example, argues that the Gothic “functioned to establish a set of polarities revolving primarily around the concepts of the primitive and the civilized” (*The Gothic* 3) and suggests that “Gothic narratives articulate anxieties . . . about the possibility of the ‘primitive’ infecting the civilised world” (*The Gothic* 41).² It is these two possibilities, renewal and reversion, inherent in the rural space that the psychic detectives investigate in these stories.

¹ For a general discussion see Raymond Williams. *The Country and the City*. London: Oxford UP, 1975; and John Lucas. *England and Englishness*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1990.

² For further discussions of the “primitive” in Gothic fiction see Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the fin-de-siècle*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004; and Valdine Clemens, *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.

The prevalence of Darwinian evolutionary discourses, the emergence of archaeology, anthropology and ethnology as more distinct and professional disciplines from the mid nineteenth-century, together with increased contact with supposedly “primitive” societies in the colonies, encouraged widespread interest in notions of the “primitive” and the means by which modern man emerged from this earlier state. Museums and private collections open to the public became popular forms of entertainment, displaying artefacts and remains collected from the “primitive” parts of the world.³ This fascination with the primitive past manifested in popular interest in the study of folklore and mythology (Classical, Celtic and comparative), and in spiritual circles, a renewed attention to paganism, pantheism and neo-Platonism. Though each area of study involved a specific set of unique ideas and arguments, for the purposes of this chapter what is most important is the question that unified them all: the focus on the ways in which the knowledge of the ancients may have something to offer the modern inquirer. The concern with alternative “ways of knowing” was a significant feature of the period and, as discussed in the previous chapter, was often constructed as a dichotomy between scientific, rational conceptions of truth and more spiritual, mystical or symbolic approaches to the world.

This is clearly demonstrated by the late nineteenth-century study of mythology which can be divided into two main approaches: the scientific, evolutionary or anthropological approach which stressed the euhemeristic⁴ value of myth-narrative; and the symbolic or mystical approach which posited that the import of myth is in what it can teach us regarding the enduring nature of the human experience. Similarly, the ancient nature religions were approached both as an historical study of “primitive” spiritual life, the gradual evolution or development of which supposedly culminated in Judeo-Christian monotheism, or alternatively were understood as a doctrine or set of practices that may have something to offer a modern practitioner dissatisfied with contemporary Christian spirituality. In both cases there is a sense in which the rational, evolutionary approach

³ For a detailed study of the role, popularity and development of museums in the nineteenth-century see Tony Bennett. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge. 1995.

⁴ Euhemeristic theories, discussed later in this chapter, refer to the understanding that mythological stories and figures are based upon actual ancient events and peoples.

suggests that the ancient knowledge was somehow “primitive”, and that by understanding it, we may come to understand contemporary “primitive” societies such as those in the Americas, Africa or the Pacific, or our own “primitive” past. The alternative approach is to see mythology and religion as “living knowledges” that have value and meaning to all people at all times, stressing a variety of possibilities, a continuum rather than a hierarchy of value.

Naturally these different approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. By the turn of the century progressive thinkers had begun to move away from strict notions of evolutionary progress towards an understanding of human development as a result of diversification, modification, adaptation and random mutation. This perspective suggests that there may not be a simple linear relationship with the past; that in fact human development may indeed have been the result of random events, which resulted in a broader understanding of “difference” and a questioning of the inevitability of “progress”. This opens up the field of inquiry to the possibility that ancient peoples and ancient knowledge may have developed along different paths at various points in history and that an examination of those older paths may yield new perspectives for a modern society that, for the past two centuries had become increasingly preoccupied with the notion of “scientific truth”. It is this potentially frightening and potentially liberating prospect that is examined by the psychic detective narratives in this chapter. Through their explorations of manifestations of the “primitive” in modern society, the detectives engage with both these approaches to “primitive knowledge”, which for the sake of brevity will be referred to here as the scientific and mystical⁵ approaches. The detectives seek to come to terms with what these “survivals” mean for their own understanding of the relationship between the past and present, and question whether the “primitive” is something to be studied, feared or embraced. In some cases the tensions between the scientific and mystical approaches is the primary focus of the story, in others one or the other dominates, but in all of them there is a sense that the confrontation with the

⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary (10th edition) gives two definitions for “mystical” both of which apply to the texts examined in this chapter: 1. having a spiritual symbolic or allegorical significance that transcends human understanding, of or relating to ancient religious mysteries or other occult rites. 2. inspiring a sense of spiritual mystery, awe, and fascination.

primitive can lead to progress and new understandings so long as the investigator retains an open mind and is willing to consider a variety of perspectives.

In order to provide a more comprehensive case study in this area it is necessary to narrow the focus to a particular type or category of mythology. Given the British focus of the thesis, this chapter will focus on Celtic mythology as a point of departure for discussions of the treatment of mythology in psychic detective fiction⁶. To this end, this chapter begins with a brief discussion of the Celtic Revival, particularly the role that mythology played within the movement, before focussing on a particular aspect: fairy lore. The late nineteenth-century interest in fairies provides a particularly fertile ground for examination since it exemplifies perfectly the prevalence of euhemeristic approaches to mythology at the time. Arthur Machen, whose urban psychic detective fiction was the focus of the previous chapter, also wrote a series of stories concerned with the fairy mythology of his native Wales, and two of these “The Black Seal” (1895) and “The Shining Pyramid” (1895) will be discussed in this context.⁷ The second part of this chapter will be concerned with the revival of interest in “primitive” nature religions. It will contextualise this within discussions of the importance of James Frazer’s book *The Golden Bough* (1890) and the Occult Revival and will then explore the literary manifestations of these debates in two pre-war psychic detective narratives: E.F Benson’s “The Man Who Went Too Far” (1904) and Algernon Blackwood’s *The Centaur* (1911). In both of these texts an outsider investigates the spiritual transformation that an acquaintance seems to be undergoing through a unique connection to the natural world. The eventual merging of the individual with nature or “the all” hints at possibilities both terrifying and liberating, and suggests parallels with new conceptions of the role of the individual within the collective in both advanced liberal and psychological discourses.

⁶ Rudyard Kipling, for example, investigated Indian myths and legends in his supernatural stories, and ~~Algernon Blackwood similarly considered~~ the beliefs of the Native Americans in his short fiction. Fascinating as these texts are, they offer us less insight into British culture during this period than that offered by an examination of Celtic mythology.

⁷ An earlier version of this analysis of Machen’s fairy stories was published as “Re-Vitalising the Little People: Arthur Machen’s Tales of the Remnant Races.” *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal*. 11 (2005): 65-78.

The Celtic Revival and Fairy Research

In the latter decades of the nineteenth-century a renewed interest in Celtic history and heritage was taking place in literary and intellectual circles. It is something of a commonplace that the Revival was a political and social movement as well as a literary one, which aimed to promote Celtic nationalism and interest in the unique aspects of Celtic imagination and history. Critical attention has generally focussed upon Yeats and the Irish Literary Theatre, though to a lesser extent William Sharp's (who wrote under the pseudonym Fiona MacLeod) poetic contribution to the Scottish arm of the movement is often recognised.⁸ The literary texts produced by the Revival tended to be mystical and aesthetic in their tone, focusing largely on the heroic and transcendent aspects of Celtic mythology. In this context, fairies were usually portrayed as tragic, ethereal, or vaguely mischievous, a depiction far removed from the ugly, vicious creatures in Machen's tales.

Many of the traditional folkloric tales concerning fairies involve kidnapping humans, stealing human babies to be replaced with "changelings" of their own, and wreaking revenge upon those who have wronged them. Though Yeats, for example, wrote a number of poems that touch upon these traditional folkloric aspects they are highly romanticised, their tone more mystical than menacing. For instance the theme of fairies kidnapping children is evident in "The Stolen Child" (1889), yet we are led to believe that "fairyland" would be a much happier and more beautiful existence for the boy where he can "chase the frothy bubbles, While the world is full of troubles" (lines 21-22), emphasised through the repeated line "the world's more full of weeping than you can understand". Similarly in "The Man who Dreamed of Faeryland" (1893) the fairies are described as "a gay, exulting, gentle race" (line 20), a haunting, dream-like presence in the hills. The poem that comes closest to a negative depiction of the fairies is Yeats's

⁸ For more detailed information on the role of Irish nationalism and socio-political factors in the Celtic Revival see Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson, "A Literature for Ireland" in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, Croom Helm, Dover, 1986; Austin Clarke, *The Celtic Twilight and the Nineties*, The Dolmen Press, Dublin, 1969; John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1987; and Lloyd R Morris, *The Celtic Dawn: A Survey of The Renaissance in Ireland 1889-1916*, Cooper Square Publishers, New York, 1970.

“The Host of the Air” (1899) where a young man’s bride is kidnapped, but never do Yeats’s fairies, or those of other poets of the Celtic Revival, reach the level of malevolence and ugliness that is depicted in Machen’s texts.

Dorothy Scarborough highlights this contrast between Machen’s work and other late nineteenth-century writers who explored folkloric themes, arguing that “Arthur Machen deals with strange, sinister aspects of supernaturalism unlike the wholesome folklore that other writers reveal to us. He seems to take his material from the Pit, to let loose upon the world a slimy horde of unnameable spirits of ageless evil” (247). Scarborough describes the work of writers such as Yeats, Fiona McLeod and Lord Dunsany as possessing “a poignant pathos, a wild, dreamy beauty” (241) or elements of “rapturous, wistful music” (248). However, in her opinion “one feels one should rinse his mind out after reading Arthur Machen’s stories” (247); they “have an effect like a slimy trail of some loathly beast or serpent” (250). This seeming disparity between Machen’s and Yeats’s fairies can be attributed to the fact that Machen’s texts focus on the ethnological rather than literary aspects of Celtic fairy lore, Machen being less concerned with the promotion of heroic and transcendental Celtic themes than with exploring the relationship between mythology and science in modern culture.

In addition to the use of fairy mythology in new works of poetry and prose, British folklorists had begun to collect, arrange and record traditions about fairies from oral and written sources throughout the British Isles including stories of the Tylwyth Teg, the Welsh “little people” named in Machen’s stories.⁹ Some of these collections investigated local beliefs regarding the nature and origins of the fairies. For instance the folklorist Evans Wentz records that:

[b]y many of the old people the *Tylwyth Teg* were classed with spirits. They were not looked upon as mortal at all. Many of the Welsh people looked upon the *Tylwyth Teg*, or fairies, as the spirits of Druids dead

⁹ See for example Thomas Keightley, *Fairy Mythology* (1828, revised and expanded in 1850), and for Welsh-specific folklore see Wirt Sikes *British Goblins* (1880), John Rhys *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (1901), and Evans Wentz *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911).

before the time of Christ; who being too good to be cast into Hell were allowed to wander freely on earth. (Wentz in Briggs 170-1)

Alternatively, Wentz also records less savoury views. For example, “they were considered to be evil spirits who visited our world at night, and dangerous to come in contact with” (Wentz in Briggs 175). This conflation of the fairies with spiritual beings is not a uniquely Welsh phenomenon. The idea that fairies were fallen angels, old gods, the souls of the dead or of unbaptized children were common among both rural communities and certain schools of spiritualism.¹⁰ Theosophists regarded fairies as elemental beings, explaining that “[a]s humans derived from mammals, so some of the elfin tribes evolved from grasses and cereals, others from reptiles and birds, and still others from sea flora and fauna” (Silver 52).

These collections of fairy folklore were not only popular with the reading public but also provided valuable primary sources for comparative anthropologists, a profession emerging in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century. Though the collection of oral traditions and the compilation of local histories typically remained the provenance of enthusiastic amateurs generally referred to as folklorists or “antiquarians”, the studies of archaeology and ethnology or anthropology gradually separated out into distinct disciplines that distinguished themselves from their amateur associates based on their scientific underpinnings.¹¹ In *Strange and Secret Peoples* (1999), Carole G. Silver explains that “what truly altered the face of fairy lore was the emergence of the “new” Victorian social sciences – anthropology, ethnology, and archaeology – and the impact they had on the increasingly scientifically oriented study of folklore” (32). Euhemerism, the idea that what is now considered myth was once based on actual historical events or people, was the primary impetus behind the majority of theories purporting to explain the origins of fairy folklore.

¹⁰ For a more detailed exploration of the religious aspects of fairy lore see Carole G. Silver *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 1999. p37-43.

¹¹ For a thorough examination of the development of the history professions in the nineteenth-century see Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1986.

Machen discusses this trend towards historicising the fairies in an essay entitled “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” from the collection *Dog and Duck* (1924), and in an earlier review essay for *Literature* “Folklore and Legends of the North” (1898). In *Dog and Duck* he discusses “a very tempting theory which now comes in our way. It has been held that the tradition of the fairies is, in fact, the tradition preserved among the Celts of the small, dark race which they supplanted” (59). Machen suggests that this theory seems to account for many of the darker aspects of fairy lore such as the kidnappings and changelings. In these essays, as in his fiction, Machen demonstrates his familiarity with modern euhemeristic theories. One such explanation of fairy origins, The Druid Theory, popularised by Robert Southey earlier in the nineteenth-century, involves the idea that:

the elfin peoples were derived from the Druids. ... [I]t was the Druids who, fleeing their conquerors and hiding in underground dwellings topped by artificial mounds, had given rise to a set of traits later ascribed to the fairies. A declining people, the Druids borrowed food from ordinary peasants and abducted women and children to swell their thinning ranks, often returning them years later. (Silver 29-30)

One of the most popular ethnological theories formulated to explain the origins of fairy mythology was the Pygmy Theory expounded by David MacRitchie in *The Testimony of Tradition* (1890). He proposes that belief in fairies grew out of a “folk memory of an actual Pygmy race ... a very early, probably Mongolian race, which inhabited the British Islands. ... When the Celtic nations appeared, these Pygmies were driven into mountain fastnesses and into the most inaccessible places, where a few of them may have survived until comparatively historical times” (MacRitchie in Wentz xxii). These ideas were reinforced by the discovery earlier in the century of the African pygmies. However, as Silver reveals, “[f]or most folklorists and anthropologists the fact that the Pygmy descendents of the fairies were black, yellow, and red – clearly ‘less evolved’ than British Victorians – rendered them ... distinctly inferior. ... The fairies were racialized, and ... became new figures for powerful though bestial evil” (50).

Later in the century, influenced by the works of Darwin and the evolutionists, speculations surrounding fairies became increasingly focussed on the idea of “survivals”

from earlier stages of evolution, and theories of parallel evolution. Sir Edward Burnet Tylor, for instance, argued in *Primitive Culture* (1871) that modern belief in fairies is a remnant of primitive ideas and myths.¹² Silver contends that “most Victorian social scientists assumed a simplified, linear, Darwinian progress; human development was upwards; human beings work out the beast, evolving from savagery through barbarism to civilization. Thus, it was of major importance to trace the relics of savagery and barbarism still surviving among civilised peoples” (45). Therefore it was assumed that belief in fairies could be understood as a relic of an earlier stage of evolution, one inference of this being that those “modern” people who still professed a belief in fairies (that is, the people of the Celtic race) are perhaps less “evolved” than their less credulous Saxon neighbours. Understandings of fairies thus became entangled not only in scientific discourses but in the tensions surrounding the construction of modern identity in contrast to “primitive” characteristics. By the turn of the century progressive thinkers had begun to question the strict hierarchy and delineation that this approach suggests. If progress is not a simple, or inevitable, shift from the primitive to the modern, then the relationship between the past and the present is open to interpretation.

That the work of folklorists did create cultural anxiety is generally taken for granted in modern studies such as Silver’s which contends that the theories folklorists developed to account for fairy belief and origins “expos[ed] fears and fantasies close to the Victorian unconscious. Looking at the ways Victorians looked at fairies provide[s] an insight into the underlying attitudes of a society” (4). Machen’s fairy texts are usually understood as exploring the anxieties associated with evolutionary theories such as the existence of “survivals” or “throwbacks”, and the possibilities of de-evolution, regression and parallel evolutions.¹³ Speaking of Machen’s work in particular, Silver offers his texts as an

example of how traditional changelings – figures populating the life and folklore of the rural poor – were appropriated by educated

¹² See also Canon J. A. MacCulloch’s *The Childhood of Fiction* (1905)

¹³ See the previous chapter for examples of critical approaches to Machen’s late nineteenth-century texts.

Victorians and reconstructed as frightening and monstrous symbols of 'otherness'. Overtly or covertly, they were increasingly perceived by folklorists, by educated readers, and by authors obsessed with them as diseased and animalistic, as evolutionary 'throwbacks' or species hybrids and as creatures of savage and inferior ethnic or racial stock. In this way, these creatures crystallized the cultural angst about the fact that evolution could and often did suggest not only progress but also reversion; they revealed the widespread fear of 'reeling back into the beast.' (86)

Certainly the prospect of remnant races committing atrocities on the outskirts of modern towns is the central theme of these stories, but to focus on public fears of evolutionary possibilities is to mistake the metaphor for the message. Given Machen's typically symbolic approach to both the world and his writing, it is highly unlikely that in these stories he is simply exemplifying modern ideas of euhemerism. One suspects that he is using a popular myth, dressed up in the science of his day, to explore a deeper point about modernity: his fear that a modern civilisation, dominated by scientific ways of thinking, may lose sight of the essential spiritual truths that "primitive" people had taken for granted.

Though his focus on mysticism is perhaps more overt than many other writers and contemporary thinkers, Machen's ideas are certainly not unique. As noted earlier, by the late nineteenth-century the notion of scientific dominance and evolutionary inevitability had been severely challenged by progressive thinkers eager to stress individual action and social conscience as the road to progress. While Machen's fiction does not use these exact terms, he is at pains to stress that the way to greater knowledge and human advancement cannot be through science alone. Like the pantheists discussed later in this chapter, Machen (and many contemporary occultists) looked back to supposedly "primitive" times for a model of thinking (usually a symbolic approach) that would allow for meaning in both the material and spiritual realms. The intention was never to *replace* science, but to ensure the metaphysical was not *excluded* from notions of human progress. Therefore if modern, civilised people had lost sight of this aspect, the ancients would have to be their teachers.

However, instead of necessarily demonstrating how progress can be achieved through the harmonising of approaches, as is the case with the professional psychic detectives discussed in Part Three, Machen chooses to teach through negative examples. As the previous chapter demonstrated, his fiction tends to examine the dire consequences that occur as a result of scientific arrogance, serving as warning tales, rather like the original Celtic fairy stories. In “The Black Seal” and “The Shining Pyramid” he adopts a similar approach, suggesting that our faith in science to shed light into all the dark places of the earth has left us particularly vulnerable to attack from things (in this case the fairies) who do not necessarily play by solely scientific rules. The “primitive” Celts knew the way to keep the fairies at bay, but “civilised” man, deeming these ideas merely unscientific superstition, is unable to adequately protect himself from what he doesn’t understand. Therefore it is the psychic detectives, able to think in both registers, who are able to realise the truth of the fairies, their mythical and evolutionary explanations. In this way Machen’s psychic detectives both *acquire* new knowledge and *recover* old understandings. In terms of progress, it is important to realise that in their investigations the detectives do not advocate a move “backwards” by reinstating superstition. Rather they realise there are forces at work that require a better understanding, and this opens up the studies of both mythology *and* science to new ideas and possibilities.

“The Black Seal”

The first of Machen’s fairy narratives, “The Black Seal” (1895), was originally published as part of *The Three Impostors*, one of the stories told to Phillipps by the disguised murderers of the Young Man With Spectacles. Phillipps is an amateur ethnologist who, as a result of his friendship with Dyson “the Wellington of mysteries”, seems to find himself drawn into the investigation of mysterious events. That this story of an ethnologist who meets his death searching for proof of the existence of fairies is told to the one man to whom it may mean more than simply an unfortunate tale, is one of the mystical coincidences on which this episodic novel is based. However, in this tale it is Professor Gregg, who is the subject of the story, that functions as a psychic detective, investigating the possibility that the “little people” still survive in isolated rural areas.

During his investigation, Gregg realises that while he may have uncovered proof of the euhemeristic theories he has studied, these theories are not sufficient to explain the true nature of the situation.

The story of “The Black Seal” is narrated by Miss Lally, a rationalist and a sceptic, who has recently experienced events that have caused her to question this stance.¹⁴ Phillipps, who holds strongly to the same principles, doubts that anything could shake his faith in the rational and scientific. Thus she offers to tell him the story of her experiences with Professor Gregg to test whether his “faith” will not be challenged as hers supposedly has been. Miss Lally explains how she had been taken in by Gregg at a time when she found herself desperate and homeless in London. She, in turn, served as his personal secretary, assisting him in his ethnological research. After some time the Professor reveals his desire to investigate a series of disappearances, showing her the material clues he had gathered: cuttings from a provincial newspaper that tell of the disappearance of a serving-girl and later of a small boy; strange symbols etched in limestone, and an ancient black stone seal inscribed with the same characters. To further his investigation the Professor moves the family to a house in Caermaen in the West of Britain, the former headquarters of a Roman Legion (a thinly disguised parallel of Machen’s birthplace of Caerleon in Wales).

Professor Gregg’s approach to the mystery is twofold. As an ethnologist he is concerned with obtaining physical proof of his theories. He will not reveal what he *thinks* the clues pertain to as he has been put on his guard by the ridicule he suffered from his fellow-scientists, their contempt for the fact he has no “hard evidence” for his theory, “nothing definite ... nothing that can be set down in hard black and white, as dull and

¹⁴ The issue of narration within *The Three Impostors* is a complex one. The text informs readers from the outset that the narrators are merely playing parts and that the tales they tell are probably fictitious. While this is a fascinating aspect of the meta-narrative, it doesn’t really affect the meaning of the individual, embedded stories in isolation. In fact “The Black Seal” is frequently anthologised as a stand-alone tale without any reference to its larger narrative context. Thus, for the sake of simplicity, in this chapter the veracity of Lally’s story and her narrative unreliability will not be foregrounded.

sure and irreproachable as any blue-book” (147). However it is clear that Gregg does in fact intuit a strange and terrifying explanation: “I look across deep waters, Miss Lally, and the land beyond may be but a haze after all. But still I believe it is not so” (145). Machen emphasises the scientific criterion for the construction of “truth” - material evidence, proof obtained through empirical means - while at the same time asserting that a deeper knowledge of reality is obtained, not through this material evidence, but through the sense of a deeper mystery. The reader is assured that “in his ordinary work Professor Gregg moved step by step, testing every inch of the way, and never venturing on assertion without proof that was impregnable” (148), but his scientific method is used in conjunction with his intuition about the reality of the agents behind the disappearances.

Gregg drops hints about the countryside seeming “strangely beautiful” and “full of mystery” (147), the “mystic hush and silence amidst the woods” making him “more than ever sure that I am hot on the scent” (148). But Miss Lally “no little of a sceptic, offended at a hint of the marvellous” (148), continues to profess her ignorance as to his meaning. When she discovers a passage in an old volume by the fourth century Latin composer Solinus discussing a stone remarkably like that which Gregg has in his possession, she is amused by this “fantastic rubbish” (150). On the contrary, Gregg is fascinated by the passage in which Solinus writes of a group he discovered:

This folk dwells in remote and secret places, and celebrates foul mysteries on savage hills. Nothing have they in common with men save the face, and the customs of humanity are wholly strange to them; and they hate the sun. They hiss rather than speak; their voices are harsh, and not to be heard without fear. They boast of a certain stone, which they call Sixtystone; for they say it displays sixty characters. And this stone has a secret unspeakable name; which is Ixaxar (150)

The mysterious race is presented as a “primitive” culture, distant from modern European notions of “humanity”, a perfect study for an ethnologist like Gregg (and

Phillipps). The passage contains no mention of anything overtly supernatural. Solinus could be discussing a tribe involved in superstitious fetish worship. But his description, mirroring the Victorian ethnological theories that Gregg is investigating, masks a more sinister interpretation that both Gregg and the reader can clearly discern behind the repeated use of the word “secret” and the mention of “mysteries” that are “unspeakable”. Language such as this is not appropriate to anthropology or the scientific approach more generally, which seeks to explain the reasons behind “primitive” behaviour in logical, cultural terms. Rather it suggests old folk-tales about the “little people” that commonly stress their mystical powers and strange practices. These people are not merely “primitive” humans; they are constructed as unwholesome, embodying an unnatural evil, hinting to the reader that they have a mystical or spiritual dimension that cannot be satisfactorily explained away by evolutionary science or cultural anthropology.

The Professor admits the possibility that the “black seal” he possesses is the Ixaxar mentioned, and begins to study Jervase Cradock, a local, mentally challenged youth, believing he has been fathered by one of the mysterious race from the hills. The local people have always steered clear of the boy and his mother, fearing their association with “the fairies”. Gregg takes on board the folk-knowledge of the country people and compares it with modern ethnological theories. What he finds is that both approaches have only really understood half the picture. Jervase is prone to fits, and when in the throes of a seizure speaks in a strange sibilant language that recalls to the reader Solinus’s description. Miss Lally begins to fear that there may be more at work in the mystery than simple ethnological research:

I was of sceptical habit; but though I understood little or nothing, I began to dread, vainly proposing to myself the iterated dogmas of science that all life is material, and that in the system of things there is no undiscovered land, even beyond the remotest stars, where the supernatural can find a footing. Yet there struck in on this the thought that matter is as really awful and unknown as spirit, that science itself but dallies on the threshold, scarcely gaining more than a glimpse of the wonders of the inner place. (154-5)

This passage forms something of a summary of Machen's own views regarding the nature of the material world. The notion that the visible world hides a more complex, spiritual reality is identified in the urban mysteries examined in the previous chapter, and is apparent in Machen's use of "mystical and symbolic language to convey those higher truths which cannot be apprehended by sensory means and which cannot be proved by logic alone" (Sweetser 76). This element of Machen's approach becomes evident at the point in the narrative where Miss Lally's and Gregg's perceptions begin to coincide. Miss Lally starts to realise that the physical clues collected by Gregg are the keys to a deeper understanding of the world. Gregg is amazed to realise that Lally has thus far been able to ignore the mystical signs:

"Don't you understand yet?" he cried. "But I have told you a good deal; yes, and shown you a good deal; you have heard pretty nearly all that I have heard, and seen what I have seen; or at least," and his voice chilled as he spoke, "enough to make a good deal clear as noonday." (158)

It now becomes clear to Miss Lally that the empirical, ethnological research may uncover something that was once believed to be solely the domain of mythology. In other words, they may have discovered irrefutable proof of the euhemeristic theories of the existence of fairies, but the catch is that this race is not extinct, and they may possess abilities that the ethnological approach simply cannot account for. Miss Lally's moment of realisation regarding the dual nature of the mystery provides the reader with the confirmation of their suspicions. Throughout the narrative Machen has placed his readers in a privileged position, allowing them to steal glimpses behind the scientific veil to see the mystical truth it hides. Unlike the reader, Lally has thus far ignored all signs that point to a reality beyond the scientific, though she has been offered the same "evidence". In this sense we, the readers, are the Initiates and Miss Lally the convert. Without realising it, Machen's readers have been co-opted to his dualistic point of view from the outset, making Lally's scientific rationalism seem foolishly one-dimensional by comparison.

The final clue is revealed when, discussing some of the strange words uttered by Jervase with the local Pastor, Gregg and Lally are told that they have no meaning in

Welsh. The somewhat baffled priest asserts jokingly that “if it belongs to any language, I should say it must be that of the fairies – the Tylwydd Têg,¹⁵ as we call them” (157). That the fairies are believed to have their own language, different in form and sound to any “human speech” again positions the fairies as doubly Other, both in ethnological, racial terms and as supernatural, mythical “non-humans” or as hybrid, animalistic creatures. Finally the Professor takes off to the hills in an effort to secure his “proof”, promising to return in two days time. Gregg of course never returns. The tale is concluded when Miss Lally reveals the contents of a letter Gregg wrote prior to his disappearance. It explains his belief in euhemeristic theories of folkloric origins, how he became “convinced that much of the folk-lore of the world is but an exaggerated account of events that really happened” and how he was “especially drawn to consider the stories of the fairies, the good folk of the Celtic races” (165). He understood that the traditional stories are much darker and more sinister than modern perceptions of fairies but what his field investigations reveal is that perhaps the folk tales contain less exaggeration than he initially supposed. He realises the truly hybrid nature of the fairies: an ancient race dispossessed by the Celts, “survivals” from a more “primitive” time, but in possession of supernatural powers that evolutionary theory alone cannot satisfactorily explain.

In “The Black Seal” Machen demonstrates his idea that “there are, speaking very generally, two solutions of existence; one is the materialistic or rationalistic, the other, the spiritual or mystic” (*Hieroglyphics* 63-64), and though he was at pains to stress the importance of the latter approach, his psychic detective narratives explore the ways in which both methods of understanding the world have a role to play in the advancement of knowledge. Miss Lally begins as a proponent of materialism, but through her association with Professor Gregg she learns that this approach to existence cannot provide all the answers. The euhemeristic theories that Gregg has studied can only take him so far into the mystery; for the rest he must trust the words of the country-folk and the evidence of his own eyes.

¹⁵ The names Telwyth Têg and Telwydd Têg to denote the Welsh fairies seem to be used interchangeably in both fictional and folkloric sources.

Machen followed up the success of this story with three other short stories concerned with the “little people”. Of these, “The Red Hand” (also 1895) discussed in the previous chapter, deals with the fairies in only a minor fashion, being more concerned with Dyson’s urban investigative innovations. A later story “The White People” (1899) also refers to the fairies but here they are not investigated; rather, they are joined by a young girl who has been initiated into their mysteries by her nurse. The remaining story “The Shining Pyramid” (again from 1895) is another psychic detective narrative in which the urban *flâneur* Dyson is reluctantly lured to the country estate of a friend with the promise of a baffling mystery. What he discovers shocks him but, being a skilled investigator, he is able to get to the bottom of the mystery since he is experienced enough in the strange ways of the world not to be tied to a single theoretical approach. Ultimately it is Dyson’s prodigious open-mindedness, demonstrated earlier in *The Inmost Light* and “The Red Hand”, that sets him apart as a psychic detective and enables him to uncover the truth about the fairies.

“The Shining Pyramid”

Vaughan, whose home lies among the ancient woods and hills in the West, near Castletown, visits Dyson in London to discuss with him two recent strange occurrences in his neighbourhood: the disappearance of a local girl, Annie Trevor, who was last seen crossing the hills on foot to visit her aunt (the superstitious townsfolk suggesting she had been “taken by the fairies”) and, far more disturbing for Vaughan, the appearance each day a number of ancient flints on a path that runs along the boundary between his property and the woods. The flints are found arranged in a new pattern each morning, resembling rows of people on the first day, a large bowl on the second, a pyramid on the third, and a half-moon had been found that very morning. Dyson, reluctant to leave his beloved London, is eventually persuaded to return with his friend to the country to see if he can shed some light on the phenomena.

Though on the day after Dyson’s arrival more flints fail to appear, he discovers a new curiosity: a red Asiatic eye freshly painted on the wall alongside the path. At first the

local children are suspected but, as additional eyes appear each day, and surveillance proves no children have been near, Dyson deduces that the same, as yet unknown, agency is responsible for both the flints and the eyes. Clues that the fairies are indeed responsible begin to multiply: discussions of the “superstitions” of the villagers, the use of pre-historic flints as everyday items, the stature of the writer and their possible racial characteristics (the mention of Asiatic features being a reference to what was believed to be the Mongolian characteristics of the ancient Pygmy race), and lastly Dyson’s realisation that the two mysteries, the symbols and the girl’s disappearance, are in all likelihood connected.

Though the device of the flints and the eyes are new, this story is really just a rewriting of “The Black Seal” under slightly different circumstances. Like Gregg, Dyson sets off for the hills to see if he can prove his conjecture. In a conversation reminiscent of Miss Lally and Professor Gregg, Dyson refuses to explain to Vaughan where he is headed or why, explaining, “I will not bother you with any suppositions. We shall in all probability have something much stronger than suppositions before long” (90). However, unlike Professor Gregg, Dyson returns from his ramble with some of the proof he needs, and is then able to take Vaughan to a place he had noted earlier, a natural amphitheatre among the hills. Hiding themselves, the men eventually witness a horrible ceremony: the “little people”, putting Annie Trevor to death on a pyre. The nature of the “fairies” is described by a horrified Vaughan peering into the hollow:

It did, in truth, stir and seethe like an infernal cauldron. The whole of the sides and bottom tossed and writhed with vague and restless forms that ... seemed to speak to one another in those tones of horrible sibilance, like the hissing of snakes ... it was as if the sweet turf and the cleanly earth had suddenly become quickened with some foul writhing growth. ... [Vaughan] saw faintly that there were things like faces and human limbs, and yet he felt his inmost soul chill with the sure belief that no fellow soul or human thing stirred in all that tossing and hissing host. (93)

In the above passage we see once again the comparison between the malevolent “little people” and snakes, as well as a sense of “inhumanity” emanating from the throng,

emphasising both their “primitive” nature and the possibility of supernatural characteristics.

As is Machen’s tendency, the details of preceding events are finally revealed in a post-climactic exposition, in this case Dyson explaining his reasoning. We learn that he realised the images formed by the flints probably corresponded to actual “things” - the bowl referring to the amphitheatre, the pyramid to the pyre and the half-moon to the time when the event would take place. The eyes on the wall were a means of marking the days. Dyson’s realisation of these facts comes after reflecting on possible connections between the cases of Annie Trevor and the phenomena on Vaughan’s property, and remembering the local fairy “superstitions”. His open-mindedness enables him to look beyond his initial distaste for the country to see that the locals may in fact have something to teach him. His sense that the two cases are connected leads him to re-read the material clues in light of a new hypothesis. Unfortunately for Annie, the pyramid symbol was not solved until witnessing the ceremony, by which time it was too late to intervene.

In each of these stories, Machen shows his psychic detectives uncovering the truth about the mysterious little people in the hills, but in order to do so they must make use of physical, material evidence in addition to an imaginative, interpretative ability. While the ethnological and euhemeristic theories that were common aspects of the scientific study of mythology are certainly proven to have a solid basis, the existence of these “primitive” beings in the modern world, and the inexplicable elements of their nature, suggest that there is more to it than science alone can explain. The fairies also have a mystical reality that is at least partially understood by the local people, and that Gregg and Dyson come to accept in addition to their more scientific theories.

The message of these stories seems to be that science alone cannot explain the mysteries of the world. This, in Machen’s view, is as it should be. Though he is not against the scientific *per se*, through his fiction he argues that, if this is the only way we understand the world, we run the risk of mistaking surface reality for the truly real.

“Primitive” people understand this. The country folk, considered by their city cousins to still be more “primitive” and “superstitious”, retain this understanding to a certain extent. If the mystical knowledges and approaches (like those held by the “primitive” cultures studied by the ethnologists, and the early Celts praised by the Celtic Revivalists) die out under the weight of scientific materialism, the world will become devoid of the “ecstasy” Machen considers so essential to human life. If it is this sense of wonder (suggesting both the positive and negative senses of awe) that enables progress and growth, then to ignore the “primitive” knowledges will in fact be counter-productive to progress. Alternatively, a society that remains open to spiritual possibilities will be better able to ensure progress on a variety of levels, rather than just technical and scientific advancement.

The next section explores the relationship between notions of the “primitive” and progress from a different perspective. Whereas in Machen’s texts the country is a site of potential danger, in the following stories the natural environment is a site of spiritual refuge, an escape from modern “civilisation” into more “primitive” notions of pantheism.

Paganism and Pantheism: Ancient Nature Religions

With its focus upon occultism, Spiritualism and psychical research, this thesis has highlighted some of the alternative spiritual dimensions explored in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As interest in “alternative” spiritualities shows, although Christianity had suffered attacks from various quarters, the drive towards metaphysical inquiry and fulfilment remained strong. In addition to the practices of occultism such as ritual magic, and Spiritualism (which often maintained a Christian undertone), anthropology opened new vistas of spiritual inquiry through studies of comparative and world religions. Under the guidance of Madame Blavatsky, Theosophy had already explored many of the principles of Eastern mysticism, Buddhism and Hinduism, such as meditative practices, trance work, chakras and yogic abilities. In addition, new studies of Native American, African and Pacific Islander spiritual traditions offered insight into Shamanism, Totemism, Voodoo and ancestor worship. Again, closer to home, the Celtic Revival prompted historical investigation into Celtic and Anglo-Saxon religious

dimensions such as Druidism and the Nordic pantheon. However, the Theosophists aside, most of the studies of alternative or comparative religion maintained an anthropological approach to the spirituality of ancient civilisations or contemporary “primitives”. Like their counterparts in Celtic studies, field anthropologists gathered stories, folklore and oral traditions to construct a kind of cultural mythology that could be analysed and studied. Mythology was thus understood as a cipher, something that could be decoded to reveal the cultural “truth” behind the “stories”.

The publication of *The Golden Bough* in 1890 by the Scottish anthropologist James Frazer had an enormous impact on the ways in which ancient and “primitive” religions were conceptualised as cultural rather than spiritual phenomena. Frazer argued that all cultures shared similar elements of religious development, depending on the particular stage of “civilisation” that culture embodied. This implied a linear progress of religious and spiritual thought that increased in intellectual complexity as a culture developed. Though Frazer received much criticism for including the history of Christianity in his general formulation of cultural symbols and rituals, thereby questioning its special place at the top of the developmental hierarchy, it was widely assumed in popular and religious discourses that a monotheistic religion was the epitome of human spiritual development. Studies of comparative religious practice such as Frazer’s had also demonstrated that “primitive” peoples experienced a different relationship with the natural environment, one that was not based simply on opposition with non-natural constructs such as the city. It was a spiritual connection that linked the individual with the wider sphere of the cosmic world, often through symbolic associations.

Explorations of the spiritual dimensions of Nature and the possibilities of Nature-worship, paganism and pantheism already had a significant history in British Romantic literature. For the Romantic poets Nature represented both freedom from encroaching industrialisation and urbanisation, and the possibility of personal redemption and regeneration. Interest in Classical mythology naturally led to an exploration of pagan

themes, and “mysteries”.¹⁶ By the late nineteenth-century writers, spurred in part by contemporary occultism and mysticism, were again turning to expressions of classical paganism in their fiction. One of the primary types of paganism that was both explored in fiction and advocated in alternative spiritual circles was “pantheism”, the notion that all Nature is spiritually charged and that human beings are part of, and able to draw upon, Nature for spiritual fulfilment.

Though often constructed as “primitive” in anthropological discourse, for people such as Algernon Blackwood, dissatisfied by monotheism, pantheism seemed a positive and progressive alternative, offering opportunities for spiritual growth and engagement with something “larger”. Pantheism is concerned with the role of both the individual and the collective. The individual is able to merge with something greater while at the same time maintaining a sense of individuality, at least while living. After death it is unclear whether the individual personality remains or becomes fully absorbed in the whole, since none of the texts consider the notion of character from this perspective. However it is clear in these stories that the characters do not fear this end and that such merging, if it is to occur, is highly desirable.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on psychic detective texts that explore the possibilities of pantheism to provide progress, on both an individual and social level. E. F. Benson’s “The Man Who Went Too Far” and Algernon Blackwood’s *The Centaur* depict the merging of individuals with a collectivist understanding of Nature. For them, this merging is a spiritual experience, but not all observers are able to comprehend their transformations. The role of the psychic detectives in these stories is a strange mixture of the anthropologist and the confessor. In each case, the protagonist chooses to reveal their secret to a close friend who they are sure will be in at least partial sympathy with their spiritual goals. Though they may be concerned for the wellbeing of their friends, the psychic detectives do not interfere with their spiritual transformations, taking on the role of observer, later attempting to explain what they have seen.

¹⁶ For a detailed examination of Classical mythology and paganism in Romantic poetry see Margot K. Louis. “Gods and Mysteries: The Revival of Paganism and the Remaking of Mythography through the Nineteenth-century.” *Victorian Studies*. 47.3 (2005): 329-362.

The “type” of person susceptible to such spiritual transformations is surprisingly stable across the three stories; they are depicted as naturally “primitive” in a number of key ways. Firstly, each of the subjects possesses an artistic temperament. Benson’s protagonist Frank (and the psychic detective who observes him) is a painter; Blackwood’s O’Malley is a travel writer; and Dr Stahl is notable for his vacillation between the scientific and the mystical. That artistic natures are associated with “primitiveness” is perhaps not surprising given the common nineteenth-century distinctions between the imaginative and the scientific, the emotional and the intellectual (which are also explored in Machen’s work). Additionally, each of these characters feels a certain animosity towards urban spaces, feeling that the world of men stifles their souls. Lastly, each of them is an atypical Englishman. O’Malley is an Irishman and thus is connected with the characterisations of the Celt discussed earlier in the chapter. He is spiritual, emotional and highly strung, factors that come to the fore when compared to his fellow psychic detective, the German Dr Stahl. And Frank, the painter, is nominally English but his “Southern” looks are remarked upon and connect him to the Greek god Pan he becomes associated with. Like Machen’s work, these stories tend to suggest that the modern Englishman may not have all the answers and that perhaps those who are constructed as “primitive” by cultural discourses may also be able to contribute to national “progress” in different ways.

“The Man Who Went Too Far”

Edward Frederick (Fred) Benson and his brother Robert Hugh (Hugh) Benson both enjoyed writing and reading ghost stories. The spiritual world was a natural interest for the two; their father Edward White Benson serving as the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1877 until his death in 1896. Though it was Hugh who followed his father into the church,¹⁷ for both brothers supernatural fiction was a way of exploring spiritual ideas and possibilities. Fred made a career as a writer, though he also served as Mayor of Rye, and his work consists primarily of short stories with supernatural themes. He was well-known

¹⁷ Hugh eventually converted to Catholicism in 1903 (after his father’s death) and went on to become a Catholic priest in 1904.

in literary circles and from the 1890s was a member of the Cambridge literary club, the Chitchat Society, with famous ghost story writer Montague Rhodes James.

Though many of his stories are of the typical ghost story variety, Benson's work often contains deeper metaphysical elements. Nicholas Freeman describes "The Man Who Went Too Far" as "a potent cocktail of paganism, pantheistic nature worship, and anti-Puritan rant" (25) and contextualises his work within "the popularity of tentative 'paganism' amongst bourgeois cultural dissidents" which he suggests often manifested as "fondness for the countryside of Sussex and Hampshire, coded homosexuality, opposition to certain elements of 'modernity' (notably industrialisation), and dissatisfaction with contemporary Anglicanism" (22). However, Freeman is quick to qualify that the "espousal of 'pagan' sentiments during the *fin de siècle* did not necessarily imply commitment to pagan religion. . . . In short, late nineteenth-century 'paganism' was more a set of associations or a loosely defined cultural movement than it was a coherent belief system. This gave it an elasticity and adaptability that made it well suited to questioning or subverting prevailing spiritual mores" (23). In this story Benson explores pagan and pantheistic alternatives to Christianity through the character of Frank. However, because his story is told and interpreted through the eyes of others (with varying levels of sympathy) Frank's spiritual journey is by no means a straightforward narrative of joy and hope. Through the juxtaposition of the search for joy and the realisation of suffering, Frank's experiences reveal more complex cultural issues concerning the possibility and method of individual progress and the relationship between the individual and the collective.

At the beginning of the story the distance of the narrator from the events he relates is immediately apparent. The narrator is never named and takes no part in Frank Halton's experiences, yet he proposes to tell the story of how Frank was "done to death": "So, such as the story is, I have set it forth in connected form. It is based partly on the accounts of the villagers, but mainly on that of Darcy, a friend of mine and a friend of the

man with whom these events were chiefly concerned” (106). From the outset the narrator gives the impression that he is telling of tragic, somewhat queer events. The very title of the story suggests his perspective: the man who went *too* far, indicating that Frank is culpable in his own death and that it is his inability to see sense that is his fatal flaw.

In the initial pages, the narrator also goes to great effort in his descriptions of the natural setting around the village of St. Faith’s, which lies beside the river Fawn in Hampshire. However he injects a sense of foreboding, depicting the village as

huddling close round its grey Norman church as if for spiritual protection against the fays and fairies, the trolls and ‘little people,’ who might be supposed still to linger in the vast empty spaces of the New Forest, and to come after dusk and do their doubtful business. ... [T]hough one would have thought that these benign and cheerful influences of wholesome air and spaciousness of forest were very healthful comrades for a man, ... the inhabitants of St. Faith’s will not willingly venture into the forest after dark. ... [A]nd though it is difficult to get from these villagers any very clear story of occult appearances, the feeling is widespread. One story indeed I have heard with some definiteness, the tale of a monstrous goat that has been seen to skip with hellish glee about the woods and shady places, and this perhaps is connected with the story. (105-106)

That the Norman church functions as a significant landmark in his description is no accident. This symbol of Christianity looms large in the passage and is set up in contrast to the “monstrous goat” which symbolises Nature worship. This juxtaposition of the church and the goat, the protector and the monster, so early in the story, hints at the narrator’s position in relation to events. Yet, although the narrator emphasises the dangerous aspects of Frank’s beliefs, it is the joy that they bring which is the focus of Frank’s and Darcy’s conversations.

Darcy has not seen his friend for six years, and seeks to understand what Frank, such a promising painter, has done with that time. At first he is shocked to see that the 35 year old Frank appears to be barely out of his teens. He has given up smoking and

become a vegetarian, but these are merely secondary aspects, for it is his contact with Nature that has caused the startling regeneration. In order for this spiritual and physical regeneration to occur, Frank had to retreat into Nature and devote his life to the pursuit of organic pleasures: “when I left London, abandoned my career, such as it was, I did so because I intended to devote my life to the cultivation of joy, and, by continuous and unsparing effort, to be happy. Among people, and in constant intercourse with others, I did not find it possible; there were too many distractions in towns and work-rooms, and also too much suffering. . . . So I took one step backwards or forwards, as you may choose to put it, and went straight to Nature, to trees, birds, animals” (111).

That Frank sees his search as a step “forwards” is significant. Though he aims for joy, Frank is quick to stress that his approach is not that of the sensualist. He sees something progressive in his approach, for once he has attained his goal of joyful unity with nature his aim is to share it with others: “it seems to me about the best thing one can do for one’s fellow-creatures, for happiness is more infectious than small-pox” (112). Likewise, the youthfulness that is a side-effect of this relationship with the Natural world is also conceived of as a source of potential rather than merely aesthetic beauty: “Think what youth means! It is the capacity for growth, mind, body, spirit, all grow, all get stronger” (110). In order to bring about this joy, regeneration and strength, Frank has integrated himself into the countryside, becoming a participant in the community of the river, interacting with the water, the trees and the animals.

Frank’s relationship with the natural world is that of the individual acting as part of a larger collective force, which he expresses to himself while swimming in the river: “I am one with it, . . . the river and I, I and the river. The coolness and splash of it is I, and the water-herbs that wave in it are I also. And my strength and my limbs are not mine but the river’s. It is all one, all one, dear Fawn” (107). Though in typical progressive discourse the notion of “the collective” is a social (and often urban) concept concerned with the participation of the individual in actions that will benefit society as a whole, the meaning of collectivism in these stories is somewhat different. To those who worship the natural world, Nature itself is a collective; it is often seen as a giant organism in which

each of the component parts have a vital role to play. Though they have an independent existence, their larger context is also of vital importance. In this sense, the collective is a biological or spiritual concept rather than a strictly social one but the essential message, of the individual participating in a larger context and acting for the good of both himself and the whole, is similar. The most significant difference is the sense of “oneness” that seems to come from merging with Nature, a feeling that is perhaps more of a spiritual experience than that of social collectivism. This idea of oneness is evident in Frank’s relationship with the local animals: “[h]e paused on the margin of the stream and whistled softly. Next moment a moor-hen made its splashing flight across the river, and ran up the bank. Frank took it very gently in his hands and stroked its head, as the creature lay against his shirt” (109). Frank has become part of the natural environment, sleeping out of doors, interacting with its inhabitants, sharing their simple pleasures.

In spite of the spiritual and physical joy he has received through his interactions with Nature, Frank does not see his actions in strictly religious terms.

Day to day, so he thought, he was getting nearer to, and in closer union with, the great power itself which caused all life to be, the spirit of nature, of force, or the spirit of God. For himself, he confessed to what others would call paganism; it was sufficient for him that there existed a principle of life. He did not worship it, he did not pray to it, he did not praise it. (116)

In contrast to this joy he has found in Nature, Frank rallies against what he believes to be the Puritanical streak in the modern world, involving “useless renunciation, asceticism for its own sake, mortification of the flesh” (ref). When Darcy asks “what about Christianity?” Frank replies emphatically: “I can’t accept it. I can’t believe in any creed of which the central doctrine is that God who is Joy should have had to suffer. Perhaps it was so; in some inscrutable way I believe it may have been so, but I don’t understand how it was possible. So I leave it alone; my affair is joy” (117).

Frank’s aim is simply the pursuit of natural joy, but in the process he begins to experience more supernatural manifestations of the spirit of Nature. He hears “the sound

quite distinctly of some flute-like instrument playing a strange unending melody” (113). He admits his initial response was fear, “I was terrified, terrified with the impotent horror of nightmare, and I stopped my ears and just ran from the place and got back to the house panting, trembling, literally in a panic” (113), but afterwards realises he has been privy to a visitation from Pan and regrets his rash response. Frank is made to wait another six months before being allowed another glimpse of the Nature God, but once he does, and responds with joy to the sound of the pipes, their melody begins to haunt him everywhere.

After hearing his friend’s story, and witnessing the seemingly miraculous changes he has undergone, Darcy is initially confused and sceptical, responding “with the sturdy revolt against any new idea which to the English mind is synonymous with nonsense” (112). But by observing his friend in the “ordinary conduct of his life” (117) he soon realises the truth of Frank’s story, “the sight of him somehow dented Darcy’s armour of common sense” (116). What bothers Darcy most is not Frank’s condition or way of life, but his firm belief that

There will be a final revelation, ... a complete and blinding stroke which will throw open to me, once and for all, the full knowledge, the full realisation and comprehension that I am one, just as you are, with life. In reality there is no ‘me,’ no ‘you,’ no ‘it.’ Everything is part of the one and only thing which is life. I know that it is so, but the realisation of it is not yet mine. But it will be, and on that day, so I take it, I shall see Pan. It may mean death, the death of my body, that is, but I don’t care. It may mean immortal, eternal life lived here and now and for ever. Then having gained that, ah, my dear Darcy, I shall preach such a gospel of joy. (114-115)

Though Darcy accepts his friend’s beliefs, he feels that Frank is missing something, that there is a “catch” he cannot put into words as yet. So he watches, and analyses his friend, assuming the role of interested observer in addition to his previous role of confidant.

One afternoon while strolling among the village shops, Darcy watches as Frank cheerfully greets an elderly woman who smiles at him then, the next moment, flees from the sight of a crying child. In response to Darcy's bewildered questions, Frank replies: "Can't you see? ... Can't you understand that that sort of thing, pain, anger, anything unlovely, throws me back, retards the coming of the great hour! Perhaps when it comes I shall be able to piece that side of life on to the other, on to the true religion of joy. At present I can't" (117). From this it becomes evident to Darcy that in Frank's quest for joy and unity with Nature he has missed an essential element: the recognition of suffering. He warns: "Cannot you guess then when the final revelation will be? ... [I]t will be the revelation of horror, suffering, death, pain in all its hideous forms. Suffering does exist: you hate it and fear it" (119-120). Frank comes to realise that his friend may be right: "Nature, take it altogether, suffers horribly ... Shall I be shown all the suffering?" (120).

Very soon after this conversation Darcy wakes at the sound of a scream coming from Frank's hammock in the garden; a "little, mocking, bleating laugh" (121) is heard as something skips away into the bushes. At first "terror incarnate and repulsion and deathly anguish ruled dreadful lines on [Frank's] smooth cheeks and forehead" (122), but in death "the look of supreme terror and agony of fear had gone from his face, a boy tired with play but still smiling in his sleep" (122). Later, marks from "the hoofs of some monstrous goat" are found on the body.

The description of Frank's death is ambiguous in a number of ways. Firstly it must be remembered that the narrator, who was not present at the event, affects the way that the event is perceived. Who is it that describes the goat as "mocking" and "monstrous"? Are these Darcy's words or the narrator's interpretation of events based on his own opinions? The only times that the goat is characterised as sinister are in the introductory pages, where the narrator establishes the setting, and again at the time of Frank's death. For the majority of the story it is the surreal beauty of Pan's music and the possibility of the revelation of knowledge that are emphasised. Indeed the narrator always refers to the entity as "the goat" while Frank and Darcy discuss him by name. In spite of

the marks on his body, the narrator cannot hide the fact that Frank appears happy in the realisations that death provides.

In his article, Freeman identifies some key questions that ultimately determine our perception of the story as a whole: “Is his death a punishment or a reward? ... Has Frank really gone ‘too far’, or has he been brave enough to transgress quotidian boundaries?” (31). If Frank’s death is a form of punishment, the only transgression he could logically be being punished for is his neglect of “suffering”, which is not a motive traditionally associated with Pan. If it is a reward, then it is for bravely facing the god. The reward is knowledge, but in this knowledge Frank must give up his life, for as Darcy has realised, Nature must contain both joy and suffering. The ancients believed that death was the inevitable result of seeing the god, for he represents the All, and no human can gain that knowledge and live. Is this ultimate revelation, the revelation that Frank so desired, what causes his death (and his happiness in death)? Or is he simply terrified and trampled to death by a giant goat? The answers seem to depend on whether the narrator is reliable, repeating Darcy’s story exactly, or whether his own perceptions of Frank’s beliefs colour his interpretations. The answer to whether Frank has “gone too far” hinges upon a similar premise. While we can never truly know the answer to this, the fact that Frank’s countenance offers evidence of a final revelation resulting ultimately in peace in death, tends to bear witness to the reality and success of his spiritual quest.

The concept of suffering as an unavoidable aspect of “the whole” has important ramifications for notions of progress within this story. Though Frank initially seeks only personal happiness, throughout his journey he comes to realise two important points: that happiness can and should be shared, and that one cannot turn a blind eye to suffering without facing the consequences. Frank’s journey can therefore be understood as a progression from selfishness (his old life and the initial stages of his quest) to selflessness (union with nature, the desire to bring happiness and recognise the suffering of others). He moves from a focus on the individual to the recognition of his role within the collective. Though his neglect of suffering means that his realisation of it, coming all at once, must result in his death, his example offers others a suggestion of a more balanced

approach to life, one that can still result in joy (for self and others) but that takes into consideration the recognition and alleviation of suffering as a necessary part of bringing this joy to the collective.

In this way Frank's story ends with a progressively liberal message: the greatest happiness is achieved when everyone works together to bring joy and alleviate the suffering of others. For the individual to progress he must take the welfare of the collective into account, and by ensuring the health of the collective, the individual also benefits. However, as anthropologists were demonstrating, this approach to life is also a common feature of many supposedly "primitive" tribal societies, and it is a telling feature of this story that to recognise this road to progress, Frank must firstly give up the city and Christianity in favour of Nature and pantheism. Thus it is the supposedly primitive notions of a "Natural" life and the unifying spirit of Nature that ultimately allow for Frank's progress and a message of progress for those moderns who hear his story.

The Centaur

A similar road to progress is discovered and advocated by O'Malley in Algernon Blackwood's *The Centaur*. Although O'Malley is a city-dweller, he takes every opportunity to leave London behind and recharge his energies in natural surroundings. However, it is not until he meets the *Urmenschen* (primitive beings) that he truly realises the possibilities that a closer relationship with Nature can offer modern man.

Algernon Blackwood's background is similar to that of Fred Benson in a number of ways. Like the Benson brothers, Blackwood was interested in all things spiritual from a young age. Though his father was a distinguished civil servant, rather than a minister, his parents were ultra-Calvinistic, and Blackwood grew up with a both a knowledge and a fear of Christian doctrine. By his twenties he had turned his back on Christianity in favour of Eastern spirituality, avidly reading sacred Hindu texts and Theosophical works, and joining the Theosophical Society in 1891. He became a member of the Golden Dawn

in 1900, but little is known of his career within this organisation; the best record of his interest in the supernatural lies in his fictional works and these reveal a strong affinity with the Natural world, a tendency towards pantheistic ideas, and a keen insight into the ways in which Nature can act on a man's soul.

Blackwood's published his first collection of supernatural tales, *The Empty House and Other Ghost Stories*, in 1906, and followed this with the John Silence stories (discussed in Chapter 7) in 1908. His subsequent novels *The Centaur* (1911), *The Human Chord* (1910), *Julius Le Vallon: An Episode* (1916), *The Wave: An Egyptian Aftermath* (1916), and the sequel to *Julius Le Vallon*, *The Bright Messenger* (1922) cemented his reputation as the paramount author of mystical fiction of his time, and his 1913 work, *A Prisoner in Fairyland*, was adapted for the stage becoming the well-known show *The Starlight Express*. After 1923 Blackwood produced mostly articles and reviews as well as a number of children's fantasy books including *Sambo and Snatch* (1927), *Dudley and Gilderoy* (1927), *The Fruit Stoners* (1935), and *How the Circus Came to Tea* (1936).¹⁸ In 1934 Blackwood earned the nick-name "The Ghost Man" by embarking on his second career reading ghost stories on BBC radio, a series that proved immensely popular during the war years, and it is for this that Blackwood is perhaps best remembered.

In addition to his esoteric studies, Blackwood openly admitted his admiration for symbolist poets such as Paul Verlaine and Emile Verhaeren whose "fascination for evoking nature and depicting a past that continued to live and influence the present had strong appeal" (Ashley 23). Similarly, Blackwood felt an affinity with the Romantics such as Goethe, Schiller, Novalis (who is frequently quoted throughout *The Centaur*) and Shelley (especially his *Prometheus Unbound*). In his own work, and particularly in *The Centaur*, which is the work that most closely expresses his own spiritual position, Blackwood draws upon these influences, and also the ideas of German experimental

¹⁸ For a full bibliography of Blackwood's works see Mike Ashley, *Starlight Man: The Extraordinary Life of Algernon Blackwood*. London: Constable. 2001: 371-376.

psychologist Gustav Fechner (1801-1887),¹⁹ who became famous for his studies of the relationship between the mind and the body. His work was popularised by William James in Britain, and was later taken up by Henri Bergson, but it is Fechner's religious views that particularly interested Blackwood. Fechner believed that

the Earth is a living, sentient being – literally Mother Earth. All living things on the Earth are part of her collective being. She in turn is part of the collective consciousness of the solar system, and that in turn is part of the collective consciousness of the Universe, and so on up to the total omniscient consciousness, which is God. (Ashley 164)

Fechner's pantheistic beliefs form the basis of O'Malley's revelation in *The Centaur*, and are a variation of Blackwood's own spiritual views. As Mike Ashley writes:

Blackwood believed that there was a unity between all creation, which existed in harmony. The relationships between all aspects and projections of Nature could be perceived by humans provided they were in tune with that harmony. Too many humans were out of tune, either by imbalanced emotions arising from everyday stress and angst, or because of the overwhelming suffocation of civilization, which had a cumulative effect of distorting the balance with Nature. Blackwood held the view that by withdrawing from this oppression of civilisation and by refocusing on the harmony of Nature you could become aware of the earth spirit and of the true spirit of Nature. (*Starlight Man* 52-53)

Though Blackwood discusses the "oppression of civilisation" in his fiction, a Romantic rather than a classically progressive position, nonetheless he, like Benson, understands Nature as a force for individual spiritual progress and cultural regeneration.

¹⁹ For a detailed examination of Fechner's life and work see Michael Heidelberger. *Nature From Within: Gustav Theodor Fechner and his Psychophysical Worldview*. Trans. Cynthia Klohr. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004.

The Centaur was not the first of Blackwood's stories to be concerned with the spiritual dimensions of this pantheistic worldview.²⁰ "May Day Eve", originally published in the collection, *The Listener* (1907), details the emergence of a new (happier, more content and enlightened) self through experiencing nature. A doctor, hostile to anything other than the material, intends to visit a friend who is a folklorist, to try to convert him to his more "rational" way of thinking. Before he reaches his friend's home he must pass through the wild, misty countryside, in which he becomes lost and confused. On his journey he begins to see the beauty, poetry and spirit of nature, and his older self battles against this emerging consciousness. Eventually he reaches the cottage only to find it inhabited by apparently elemental beings; a divine woman and a man-beast. They merge with him and he realises they are really parts of his Self and that he must recognise and absorb both to be whole. Though the doctrine of pantheism does not feature explicitly in this story, the message is clear that Nature is capable of regenerating the Self and making it more whole if the individual becomes open to it. In *The Centaur* Blackwood builds upon this story by expanding its viewpoint. Instead of focussing only on the specific character undergoing the experience, the novel examines the possibility of regeneration on a much larger scale. Though it is O'Malley who is the focus of the story, the implications of his realisations are universal, and in the aftermath of his experience he dedicates his life to spreading the "gospel" of Nature to ensure human progress.²¹

Like "The Man Who Went Too Far", *The Centaur* is narrated by a character outside of and external to the principle events. He is a friend of O'Malley's who hears his story in its entirety and is with him at the time of his death. Following O'Malley's death he gathers his friend's possessions, including a number of manuscripts in which O'Malley has attempted to write down his experiences, and it is from a combination of his memories and these manuscripts that the narrator pieces together the story for the reader. Unlike the narrator of Benson's story, he is sympathetic and attempts accuracy as far as possible. He expresses the difficulty of putting O'Malley's story into words – a

²⁰ Nor was it the last. For stories dealing with similar themes published after *The Centaur* see "The Man Whom The Trees Loved" (1912), "The Sea Fit" (1912), "The Regeneration of Lord Ernie" (1914) and "A Touch of Pan" (1917).

²¹ In this Blackwood echoes the views of Edward Carpenter whose books he admired.

difficulty O'Malley himself shared as is evident from his discussions with the narrator and his manuscripts- but offers the reader a version of events as complete as possible.

Essentially *The Centaur* tells the story of two friends, a German psychologist Dr. Stahl and an Irish journalist Terence O'Malley, who encounter a mysterious man and his adopted son on board a steamer bound for the Black Sea. These passengers project a sense of "largeness" about them; they seem wild and solitary and are instinctively shunned by the rest of the passengers. Stahl, who has studied this "type" before, refers to them as *Urmenschen* (52), "primitive beings", and seeks to understand their origins and psychology. O'Malley who has spent his life feeling a similar isolation and call to the wild, natural places of the earth sees in the strangers the possibility of kindred spirits, and wishes to accompany them on their journey to Batoum in the Caucasus.

Throughout the book, O'Malley is characterised as "An ardent lover of wild outdoor life, he knew at times a high, passionate searching for things of the spirit." (10) He emphasises that "[n]ever in cities or among his fellow-men, struggling and herded, did these times come to him, but [only] when he was abroad with the wind and stars in desolate places" (10). From the beginning, this wild, natural aspect of his personality is referred to as "primitive" and is contrasted with the "modern" sensibilities his fellow men adhered to. Though at first glance it seems that the "modern world" comes under attack by Malley, "Civilisation, he loved to say, had blinded the eyes of men, filling them with dust instead of vision" (9), it is primarily the rampant materialism without a corresponding spiritualism that O'Malley abhors: "men work like devils for things of no value in order to accumulate them in great ugly houses; always collecting and collecting, like mad children, possessions that they never really possess – things external to themselves, valueless and unreal –" (83). Here modern materialists are characterised as child-like, an interesting reversal of the common paternalistic approach to "primitive" societies. However, the modern world and civilisation are not depicted as wholly degenerate or irredeemable, just one-sided:

mere intellectuality, by which the modern world sets such store, was a valley of dry bones. Its worship was a worship of the form. It missed the essential inner truth ... Reason and Intellect, as such, had come to be worshipped by men to-day out of all proportion to their real value. Consciousness, focussed too exclusively upon them, had exalted them out of due proportion in the spiritual economy. To make a god of them was to make an empty and inadequate god. Reason should be the guardian of the soul's advance, but not the object. Its function was that of a great sandpaper which should clear the way of excrescences, but its worship was to allow a detail to assume a disproportionate importance. (13)

He advocates

two separate sets of faculties, subtly linked, one carrying on the affairs of the physical man in the 'practical' world, the other dealing with the spiritual economy in the subconscious. To attend to the latter alone was to be a useless dreamer among men, unpractical, imbalanced; to neglect it wholly for the former was to be crassly limited, but half alive; to combine the two in effective co-operation was to achieve that high level of a successful personality. (148)

The notion of "progress" that O'Malley (and Blackwood whom he speaks for in this novel) promotes is a combination of the best elements of "primitive" and "modern" civilisations. By combining the spiritual connection with Nature that earlier societies were based on, with the judicious application of the intellect that modern, scientific societies so pride themselves upon, society can progress in a balanced manner. It is this lack of balance that has led to the evils of materialism and the degeneration of spirit which O'Malley observes. In spite of his passion for Nature O'Malley admits to fearing that "[c]omplete surrender would involve somehow a disintegration, a dissociation of his personality that carried with it the loss of personal identity" (11). For some pantheists this end is desirable, but it seems that O'Malley desires more than personal fulfilment. His hope is to help the world learn the lessons that Nature has to teach, and to do this, a balance also needs to be found between himself as an individual human, and as a part of the collective system which is Nature. It is this lesson that is the primary knowledge he gains from his time with the *Urmenschen*.

Dr Stahl is aware of his friend's personality and fears that one day O'Malley will suffer a psychological "break" as a consequence. When they encounter the *Urmenschen* aboard the steamer, Stahl is caught between his concern for his friend, and his desire to observe the influence they have upon his psyche. Like Darcy in Benson's "The Man Who Went Too Far" Stahl is placed in an awkward position as a psychic detective: he is inclined to question and study the events he witnesses but at the same time performs the role of confidant to his friend. He studies unusual psychology for a living, but because of this is very aware of the possible dangers of unusual minds acting on others. He wants to help his friend's spiritual growth (and take notes at the same time) but he also wants to keep his friend from harm. In this way he acts as both observer and confidant, studying the events but with a personal interest in the outcome.

Both O'Malley and Stahl are determined to understand the *Urmenschen*, but they differ in their approaches. In relation to the mystery of the "larger than life" passengers we are told that "there was this competition on the part of the two friends to solve it, from opposing motives" (32). O'Malley's motivation is more personal; he hopes they may shed some light upon his own psyche. Stahl's motivation is both scientific and personal, for we learn that not only does he wish to help his friend but is hiding the fact that his psyche possesses similar longings that he is afraid of acknowledging. The characterisation of Stahl is complex. At times he is every inch the scientist, with O'Malley feeling "that he was being played with, coaxed as a specimen to the best possible point for the microscope" (88). Yet it becomes clear that "[t]here was, after all, the poet in him side by side with the observer and analyst" (60), and that he is more open to psychic experiences than many of his scientific colleagues. He is repeatedly characterised as a "scientific mystic" (135) and "alternatively scientist and mystic" (144), and as a result becomes a far more sympathetic character, attempting to understand the events by using a combination of approaches. As he comments to O'Malley, "'our training has been different,' observed Stahl simply, ... 'I use another phraseology. Fundamentally, we are not so far apart as you think.'" (85).

One of the ways in which Stahl “coaxes” his friend is by introducing him to the ideas of Fechner, by way of giving him William James’s Hibbert Lecture.²² As O’Malley becomes familiar with his ideas, he realises that the *Urmenschen* represent a type of “survival” from a time when beings were closer to Mother Earth than they are now. So, when the steamer reaches Batoum, O’Malley leaves Stahl to travel with them, seeking to learn from them how to merge with the Earth spirit. After weeks of trekking through the wilderness they reach a garden where O’Malley’s transformation takes place. As a result he comes to realise his earlier mistake: “To [let myself] go involved, I felt, an inner catastrophe that might be Death – that it would be out of the body, I mean, or a going backwards. In reality, it was a going forwards and a way to Life” (46). No sooner does he realise this than he understands why he cannot stay. “A wave of pity and compassion surged in upon him ... No happiness, he understood, could be complete that did not also include them all” (228). His mission has become clear to him: his experiences, and the realities he has been shown must be shared with others who are suffering under the yolk of modern civilisation.

O’Malley feels he has discovered the means of ensuring social and spiritual progress by advocating a reunion with Nature. For him, Nature had never been a purely primitive impulse, “by Nature he did not mean a return to savagery. There was no idea of going backwards in his wild words. Rather he looked forwards” (13), and he assures his friend that the impulse to return to Nature is not “what their precious academic books so stupidly call ‘degenerate,’ for in me it’s damned vital and terrific, and moves always to action” (39). It is this message of progress through Nature that O’Malley wished to share, emphasising its regenerative qualities, spiritual power and ability to offer an “active” way “forward” for a civilisation languishing in materialism. The relationship between the individual and the collective is also a lesson O’Malley wishes to impart. He fears that modern man has misunderstood the meaning of “Self”, claiming that “[t]heir minute normal Self they mistake for the whole, hence denying even the experiences of others.”

²² The Hibbert Lectures are an annual theological lecture series held at Manchester College, Oxford. In 1908 William James presented a paper entitled “A Pluralistic Universe” which addressed many aspects of Fechner’s and Henri Bergson’s work. In 1909 James published a book by the same name. It is presumably a copy of this paper that Stahl gives to O’Malley.

(136). His experiences have taught him that “the personal self must be merged in a larger one to know peace” (143), but that “[t]o be gathered up in this one greater consciousness was not the end. . . . Rather was it merely the beginning” (220). Though Blackwood was never outspoken about his political views, his attitudes, as expressed in his fiction, tend to denote sympathy with certain aspects of socialism. Blackwood was acquainted with the socialist Edward Carpenter, one of the founders of the Fabian Society, and greatly admired his works, *Towards Democracy* (1883) and *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* (1889), which promoted association with Nature as a “cure” for the “disease” of civilisation. Though political socialism is not discussed in Blackwood’s work, he seems to be advocating a kind of mystical or spiritual socialism in which individuals work together for the spiritual good of the whole.

Darcy, Stahl and O’Malley are all investigate the modern reality of pantheism, the spirituality of Nature and the ways in which supposedly “primitive” ideas may be essential to the continuing progress of mankind. As amateur psychic detectives they each have different investigative approaches. Darcy is a painter who becomes fascinated with his friend’s apparent transformation and begins to analyse his experience. Like the anthropologists who immerse themselves in tribal life, Darcy lives with Frank, observing, discussing and experiencing his spiritual life. At no stage does he interfere, merely offering observations on the philosophical underpinnings of Frank’s quest. It is he who attempts to place Frank’s experience within a more widely understandable frame of reference, interpreting and questioning the precise nature of his religious views. Following Frank’s death, Darcy passes on his experiences in narrative form. Stahl, on the other hand, is a more experienced investigator, his psychological practice offering him plenty of opportunities to study unusual minds and experiences in many forms. Though he is personally involved in this case because of his friendship with O’Malley, he retains his analytical approach, manipulating his friend into situations where he can be observed and tested. Though he attempts to warn his friend of the possible dangers, he is very aware of O’Malley’s mindset and is mostly encouraging towards his friend’s experiments. O’Malley is in an unusual position in that he is both investigator and investigated. Though he searches for the truth about man’s relationship with nature, he

also embodies this relationship, experimenting with his own psyche and placing his Self at the centre of his investigation.

Though none of the three detectives has what could reliably be called a “critical distance” from their objects of study, the evidence they uncover is presented to the reader (through the medium of narrators external to events) in a form as complete as they can manage. In the case of *The Centaur*, the reader is given the impression that the narrator is reliable and working from a variety of sources, so O’Malley’s and Stahl’s experiences are easily accepted. However in “The Man Who Went Too Far” Benson makes his readers work harder for the meaning, suggesting that the narrator may not be presenting evidence in exactly the same light as Darcy may have presented it to him. Even if Benson’s narrator suggests Frank’s death was no more than the work of a “monstrous” goat, his prejudices may even serve to highlight Frank’s spiritual revelations more in comparison.

Machen, Benson and Blackwood each engage with discourses of “primitiveness” common in folkloric and anthropological studies at the turn of the century. Instead of accepting the “primitive” as a stepping stage on the way to the greatness of modern civilisation, a version of progress typical of mid nineteenth-century classical liberalism, each of these authors explores the possibility that primitive ideas and beliefs may have an important role to play in the spiritual development of the modern world. For Machen, “primitive people”, as represented by the Celtic fairies, understand the importance of seeing the world through the eyes of mystery, recognising mystical, spiritual and symbolic realities as well as material and scientific ones. For Benson and Blackwood, the relationship with Nature that anthropologists had shown to be characteristic of “primitive” cultures, is rethought and considered in relation to the modern world. It is suggested that the ancient ideas of pantheism, popular with earlier Romantic poets, may indeed offer the modern, civilised man a means of progress that does not place undue emphasis upon the material world, possessions, industrialisation and urban spaces. Since, in their view, Christianity had failed to offer a way out of the bankruptcy of modern life, perhaps more “primitive” and Natural modes of being can offer spiritual progress.

PART THREE

**TALES FROM THE CONSULTING ROOM:
THE PROFESSIONAL PSYCHIC DETECTIVE**

INTRODUCTION TO PART THREE

In the closing decades of the nineteenth-century, the amateur detective began to be replaced by his professional counterpart in both literature and society.¹ Although the “accidental” investigator and the “hobbyist” still featured in one-off supernatural tales, the psychic detective increasingly began to feature in serial narratives, a popular format for detective fiction; and the character “type” of the psychic detective developed accordingly. If an investigator were to re-appear in numerous stories, there had to be some reason for the supernatural to keep crossing his path. Consequently, in these stories, dealing with the paranormal became a profession rather than an unfortunate accident. What began to set the professionals apart from their amateur predecessors was primarily an issue of training and vocation. These psychic detectives were prepared by way of vigorous training, detailed study and extensive experience to deal with the forces with which they came in contact. Moreover, helping others solve their paranormal problems was their vocation. More than a hobby or passing fancy, for these detectives, like their counterparts in the helping professions, assisting others was their *raison d’être*.

In his *magnum opus* *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (1989), Harold Perkin outlines the development of British society from the aristocratic ideal, through the industrial ideal to what he terms the “professional ideal”, explaining that “where pre-industrial society was based on passive property in land and industrial society on actively managed capital, professional society is based on human capital created by education” (2). Perkin identifies the decades from the 1880s to the First World War as a period of transition in which “the professional ideal” emerges. He describes this ideal as being based on “trained expertise and selection by merit. ... Its ideal citizen was also a self-made man of sorts, who had risen by native ability (with a little help from his

¹ Much work has been done on the development and gradual professionalisation of the British police force and the emergence of Scotland Yard. For more information see David Taylor, *The New Police in Nineteenth-Century England: Crime, Conflict and Control*, Manchester: Manchester UP. 1997 or Phillip Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London: Political Policing, Public Order, and the London Metropolitan Police*. Westport: Greenwood Press. 1985.

educational institutions) to mastery of a skilled service vital to his fellow citizens” (xxiii). As the following chapters will demonstrate, these three elements - training, native ability and providing a vital service - are all evident in the professional psychic detectives.

The issue of providing a vital service is especially interesting in this context. Perkin writes that one of the catalysts for professionalisation is the “demand for ever more specialized services” (xxiv). The key term here is “service”. The formation in the nineteenth-century of a large, and still expanding, middle class is partially the result of the “accelerating expansion of service occupations during the Victorian Age” (85). Professions that involved the provision of services rather than the production of goods became a dominant faction within the middle class, and the “helping professions” such as psychiatry, social work and nursing sought increasing recognition and professional status towards the end of the century. As Chapter Seven will show, the characterisation of professional psychic detectives begins to have much in common with these “helping professions” after the turn of the century. The vital service that the psychic detectives provide to their clients is a mixture of detective work, therapy and education. The psychic doctors regard their “work” as a way to assist people in need who would otherwise slip through the cracks of a more traditional medical practice. Importantly though, they are not simply providing charity. A key element of their practice is helping their patients understand how to help themselves. In this way, the psychic doctors have much in common with the social reformers who sought to understand, assist and improve on a long term scale, rather than offering only short-term comfort.

As a result of their training, psychic detectives are experts in the theory of psychic phenomena. In this role of learned educators, they function as members of the intellectual class: in the cases examined in the following two chapters, they are the sole sources of knowledge, sometimes functioning as “gatekeepers” keeping dangerous information out of general circulation, at other times disseminating vital ideas and promoting a new understanding of the sciences. Perkin’s definition of the intellectual class as “embrac[ing] three overlapping groups: what had formerly been called ‘men of letters’, ‘men of science’, and university teachers” (86), seems particularly fitting to the multi-faceted

professional psychic detective. Building upon Perkin's work, David Trotter discusses the "inexorable spread, at all levels, and in all activities, of professional methods and ideas" (*Paranoid Modernism* 81). Trotter argues that professional status forms a kind of symbolic capital in which the client pays for experience and training. This is precisely what happens with the psychic detectives in these stories. Clients seek them out because it is understood that they can do what few others can. Their training is both what sets them apart from the amateurs, and provides them with their credentials, while the stories of their former successes become testimonials, a form of advertising and a guarantee of their abilities.

At this time the psychical sciences were also battling to gain a more official status. The Society for Psychical Research afforded members a kind of official standing but the majority of members remained part-time researchers or hobbyists, more akin to the "hobbyists" in the previous section than dedicated professionals. It would seem logical to assume that the greatest hurdle to the professional status of the psychical sciences would have been the established physical sciences which had a far longer standing and the advantage of purveying a widely acknowledged "truth". However, as Roger Luckhurst argues in *The Invention of Telepathy* (2002), the more solidly guarded boundaries of the physical sciences allowed other disciplines to emerge through the spaces in between:

different disciplines and professional societies resolved issues of defining expertise and tactics of inclusion and exclusion in different ways, and some boundaries remained more permeable to the amateur or generalist than others. This messier picture is vital to grasp, for it was this unevenness and uncertain provenance of expert knowledge that generated the possibility of new sciences like psychical research. Psychical researchers did not produce a counter-knowledge to a scientific naturalist monolith: there was no simple structure to oppose. Rather, their knowledge emerged along the fault-lines within a fragile edifice. (21)

Like the researchers into psychical science, psychic detectives also inhabit the spaces between recognised professions and disciplines and, in the stories examined in the

following chapters, begin to forge a profession of their own between the cracks. Not exactly psychologists, not policemen and not scientists in the strictest sense, the professional psychic detectives form a unique professional group. This flexibility allows them greater freedom to experiment with alternative methodologies and to develop unique systems that combine aspects of various scientific and occult traditions. This combination or merging of different perspective to create a new discipline, full of the potential to enlighten and assist where other more traditional methods may fail, is the key to the resolution of these psychic detective stories.

In addition to the professionalisation of psychical research, the very nature of popular mysticism had also begun to alter by the turn of the century. The mid-century craze for Spiritualism had begun to wane as a result of claims of fraud and trickery, and many of the followers had moved on to new and more fashionable mystical outlets such as Theosophy and ritual magic as practiced by societies such as The Golden Dawn. In *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (2004), Alex Owen refers to this trend as the “new” occultism, and highlights a number of differences between this and earlier spiritualist movements:

Fin de siècle occultism attracted an educated, usually middle-class clientele in search of answers to fundamental but nonetheless profound questions about the meaning of life and the spiritual dimensions of the universe. In certain respects the ‘new’ occultism represented a somewhat elitist counterpoint to the hugely successful Victorian spiritualist movement that had preceded it. ... There was an implicit understanding that it was learning rather than the less predictable mediumistic ‘gifts’, that underwrote the new spirituality.
(5)

The “new” occultism stressed discipline, dedication, practice and control, qualities that resonated with the professional middle classes.

By the end of the century psychic detective fiction begins to reflect this movement towards professionalisation and “new” occultism through changes in both detective methodologies and the types of supernatural problems that come under

investigation. Specifically, the professional psychic detectives differ from their amateur predecessors in two key ways: firstly, through the esoteric training which allows them to draw upon both scientific and occult knowledge to solve supernatural problems; and secondly, through treating the supernatural as an internal, personal affliction that can be healed rather than an external “site” that requires cleansing or an “entity” that needs to be destroyed. Significantly, although both of these factors are not always found within the same detective character, overarching both of these shifts is the notion the detectives have of themselves as professionals with a vocation to assist people in need.

The position of the professional psychic detective is a far cry from the situation of the accidental hero or Gothic heroine. The professionals are not only involved with the supernatural of their own free will, but are in control of the situations they encounter. Unlike the aura of uncertainty and fear of powerlessness that pervades many late eighteenth century Gothic novels, tales concerning professional psychic detectives are characterised by the hallmarks of the detective genre: clever problem solving, clear reasoning and uniquely talented protagonists. Moreover, the fundamental ideology shared by all of the professional psychic detectives examined in this section is the certainty that the study of the supernatural is simply a new and emerging discipline (akin to the more traditional physical sciences but also involving the human or social sciences such as psychology and anthropology) which will be more thoroughly understood in the fullness of time. Perkin writes that professional status confers on its bearer, “independence, security, the right to criticize without fear of the consequences, and so a secure position from which to defend one’s place in society or, if he so wishes, a position of leverage from which to change society or one’s own corner of it” (8). The professional psychic detectives in the following chapters advocate a particular doctrine of “mystical positivism”, using their unique position not only to help people in need but also to educate those around them, preaching the gospels of progressive science, modern technology and broadening horizons, while at the same time defending against a doctrine of pure scientific rationalism because of the narrow materialism it often engenders.

Part Three is divided into two chapters. The first, “Merging Methodologies”, examines sets of stories about three psychic detective characters: Flaxman Low, created by Kate and Hesketh Prichard in 1898; William Hope Hodgson’s Thomas Carnacki, 1910; and Norton Vyse, introduced by Rose Champion de Crespigny in 1919. These three professional psychic detectives exemplify the late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards psychical research, believing their unique work falls within the realm of the sciences, but defining the very concept of “science” in a broad and progressive manner that involves elements of thinking from alternative sources.² Like their amateur counterparts, these detectives approach the supernatural rationally, but by utilising a combination of both occult and mainstream scientific methodologies and apparatus, these characters redefine notions of the supernatural, transforming it from the great unknown into a phenomenon that can be understood and worked with if approached in the right manner. Chapter Seven, “Psychical Psychology”, introduces two more professional psychic detectives, John Silence, created by Algernon Blackwood in 1908, and Dr Taverner, introduced by Dion Fortune in 1922. Although there is a greater time span between these two literary creations, the outlook and approaches of the characters are remarkably similar. They represent another stream of development in early twentieth century British culture that had an enormous impact upon supernatural fiction: the psychoanalytical movement.

Together, these two chapters demonstrate the shift beginning at the end of the nineteenth century towards a new type of psychic detective: a client-focussed professional, specially trained in the use of scientific and occult theory and methodology, dedicated to establishing the supernatural on a rational and progressive footing so that it can be studied, understood and often controlled. In short these detectives seek to demystify the supernatural, removing the fear and anxiety associated with it, and leaving in its place a sense of excitement, possibility, and the potential for new ideas.

² On the commitment to the breadth of intellectual life in progressive circles, see Christopher Mauriello. “The Strange Death of the Public Intellectual: Liberal Intellectual Identity and the ‘Field of Cultural Production’ in England, 1880-1920.” *Journal of Victorian Culture*. 6.1 (2001): 1-26.

CHAPTER SIX

MERGING METHODOLOGIES

This chapter explores three professional psychic detectives whose approaches towards investigating the supernatural involve an amalgamation of scientific and occult approaches. The issue of combining knowledge forms has been explored in Chapters Four and Five in relation to Arthur Machen's amateur sleuths. Machen's symbolic approach to the world manifests in an emphasis upon seeing beyond the physical, material world in order to understand a deeper reality beyond. Though the ability to understand the role of symbolism and random events is essential to the solution of the mysteries his detectives investigate, so too are the physical clues, the letters, coins, paintings etc, which give the detectives direction. But for Machen's detectives there is a clear division between the two modes of thinking that is evident, for example, in the relationship between Dyson and his various partners, and their conflicting interpretations of the mystery. In this chapter, the relationship between scientific and occult approaches to the world manifests in a different way. For these detectives, equally trained in both esoteric and scientific doctrines, the two approaches merge into a unified methodology. These professionals do not see the difference between the two knowledge forms; for them the supernatural is simply another object of study that, like all scientific disciplines, makes use of discipline-specific tools and theories.

Though this may be understood as a fictional depiction of real-world psychical research in which investigators, such as those mentioned in Chapter Three, undertake to examine purportedly paranormal phenomena empirically, the professional psychic detectives in this chapter move beyond the desire to simply place the supernatural under the microscope. These characters have much in common with the real-world psychical researchers, even to the extent of undertaking to "debunk" the events in some cases, but they move closer towards understanding the real phenomena in their own terms, rather than trying to make established scientific methods and instruments do "double duty". In the texts examined here, the researchers are attempting to forge a new science that utilises new tools and, interestingly, both new and ancient ideas. These detectives also engage

with the idea of folkloric wisdom, explored in Chapter Five, but here in the guise of ancient occult principles that are can now be combined with more traditional scientific ideas in the formation of their “new science”.

It is true that, although occult and scientific ideas and methods are regarded equally by these detectives there is a sense in which the scientific “way of knowing” does, in many cases, dominate in these specific texts. This is most clearly evident in the terminology they choose to employ when describing their profession. All of the detectives in this chapter regard themselves as “men of science”. They consider their work as forging a “new science” or adding to “scientific” knowledge. In fact, given the characterisation of these detectives, it is questionable whether any of them would be willing to accept the label of “occultist”, which is one of the ways in which they differ radically from the psychic doctors to be discussed in the next chapter. The reason for the dominance of scientific nomenclature, even though the individual detectives readily admit to occult training and the vitality of this aspect in their work, lies in their status as professionals. Though, as this chapter will suggest, contemporary occultism shared many of the progressive and liberal attitudes common to middle-class professionals in the early twentieth-century, occultism, however popular, was not a profession. To be regarded as professional, these detectives must style themselves as “scientists” (a recognised profession, and increasingly so since the 1880s) in order to provide greater credibility for their work and to be acknowledged for their expertise.

The professional psychic detectives in this chapter, Flaxman Low, Thomas Carnacki and Norton Vyse, have all undergone both scientific and occult training. The specific nature of their scientific training is never clearly revealed. With regards to the particular characters examined in this chapter, it is reasonable to assume that Low is a medical doctor who has specialised in psychology, Carnacki is hard to place but tends to discuss physics most frequently, and Vyse specialises in the relationship between physics and the mind (as a result of his skill in psychometry) but his specific training is unclear. If their scientific training is difficult to determine, the nature of their occult training is near impossible to explain accurately. However, in keeping with his interest in

psychology, Low has studied the relationship between folkloric explanations for seemingly supernatural events and the ways in which these might be integrated into the field of psychology. Carnacki specialises in ritual magic (correspondences between special items, symbols and movements) and combines this with his knowledge of physics to create new technology. And Vyse is trained in psychometry, the ability to see the past and the future through the application of the mind to a specific object, but sees this ability in terms of the physics of vibrations. In spite of the differences between the specific interests of these professional psychic detectives, their dual training manifests in their cases in two ways: an understanding of the specific nature of the supernatural and the merging of scientific and occult methodologies in their problem solving. According to their perceived status as professionals, each of the detectives maintains that the study of the supernatural is simply a new and emerging science, which will one day be better understood by the wider community. Until that day, these professionals offer their unique services to shed light in places where humanity is currently in darkness.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the practice of psychology becomes very closely tied to psychic detective narratives after the turn of the century, but the role of the three professionals in this chapter is not so much to assist individuals who suffer psychic afflictions within themselves (as John Silence and Dr Taverner do), but rather to explain the existence of apparently supernatural phenomena, external to the self, as nevertheless scientifically grounded and able to be studied by the well-informed professional. What will become apparent in this chapter on detective methodologies is that Low, Carnacki and Vyse differ from Silence and Taverner not so much in their perceptions of the supernatural but in the types of cases they treat and the role they see themselves playing; in other words, which aspect of the science they focus upon. Silence and Taverner are therapists, where the detectives in this chapter are more closely aligned with research scientists.

On a structural note, one difference between the amateur and the professional immediately apparent to readers is a shift in the narrative persona from an embattled participant or friend to an “authorised” chronicler in the style of Holmes’s Watson. Some

of these offsidiers take a more active role in events than others. In the next chapter dealing with Silence and Taverner the position of the professional “assistant” will be more fully explored, since these occult therapists make great use of their assistants, to the extent that some of the cases owe more to their work than their more illustrious masters. In any case, the narrative device of an official chronicler gives these stories a further professional air, encouraging readers to believe the more miraculous elements of the cases as they are being dictated in a considered manner by an apparently reliable, albeit hardly independent, witness. This method of narration allows for a clear focus on the investigative methodologies employed by the psychic detectives. Since each of these psychic detectives appears in a series of cases, this provides a larger framework for understanding their approach to the supernatural in general and their work in particular.

Flaxman Low

Kate and Hesketh Prichard, the mother and son writing duo who often published under the pseudonym E. and H. Heron, created the first psychic detective “series”. It is not coincidental that the first detective to appear in a number of linked cases is also the first “professional” detective, since the ongoing commitment to facing the supernatural is one of the hallmarks of the professional. Serialised in *Pearson’s Magazine* from 1898, the Flaxman Low stories arguably owe more to Hesketh’s creative imagination than Kate’s, his mother providing more in the way of editing assistance and a strong sounding board.¹ Hesketh Prichard himself was a well-known literary personality in his day, an active member of the Author’s Society (and its chairman in 1913). As his friend Eric Parker recalls: “He was a prominent figure in the literary world, and was asked for advice

¹ Hesketh’s biographer Eric Parker is understandably coy about the nature of the writing partnership in his tribute to his friend: *Hesketh Prichard D.S.O., M.C. Hunter: Explorer: Naturalist: Cricketer: Author: Soldier. A Memoir by Eric Parker*, published by T. Fisher Unwin in 1924. In this book he claims that he could discern Kate’s hand in certain phrasings, but goes on to detail Hesketh’s solo writing exploits and indeed Hesketh Prichard did publish quite a number of books under just his own name. Typically the fictional writings bear both names, transformed into the pseudonym E. and H. Heron, but the tales of travel, sport and hunting are Hesketh’s alone. The one exception to this rule is the series of November Joe stories (1913) which appear under only Hesketh’s name. Why this should be so is unclear, but a discerning reader can detect many similarities of plotting, characterisation and dialogue between these tales and the Flaxman Low stories, lending support to the theory that Kate’s role in the fiction may have been more editorial than creative.

and counsel by beginners; he was active in the interests of the Author's Society and the Authors' Club, and was asked to take the chair at weekly house dinners" (119). His other fictional series, the "Don Q" stories about a Spanish bandit (1903-1906), and tales of the Canadian detective November Joe (1913) were enormously popular, earning him a large enough income to support his travel and hunting expeditions. An amiable man and enthusiastic sportsman, he appears to have been well-liked among his contemporaries, claiming as friends fellow cricketers Arthur Conan Doyle and J. M. Barrie and magazine editors C. B. Fry and Arthur Pearson. It was Pearson himself who commissioned the Flaxman Low stories for his magazine, which a youthful Hesketh began composing during his travels to Spain and Portugal in 1896.

There is no evidence that Prichard was ever involved in Spiritualist or occult circles. Indeed he was frequently out of the country for years at a stretch, so it is understandable that when the Flaxman Low stories were collected into a book and published as *Ghosts: Being the Experiences of Flaxman Low* in 1899, the authors were surprised to see it billed as a collection of "real" ghost stories. Parker writes in his biography, "the authors were somewhat disturbed to find them afterwards published with the additional description "real," since, though they were founded on experiences attested by the Psychical Society, they were not real experiences known to the authors, and the characters, of course, were imaginary" (36-37). In spite of the avowedly fictional nature of the stories, Hesketh Prichard draws upon many of the phenomena widely discussed in popular texts and periodicals, and the author's detachment from the events allows his detective Flaxman Low to mirror his creator's critical distance.

Flaxman Low is a psychic detective who believes his profession falls within the realms of cutting-edge scientific research into the human mind, a combination of neuroscience and psychology. His position at the forefront of a new and expanding field is of great importance to him, as he explains in a letter to his biographer: "I think I may say that I am the first student in this field of inquiry who has the boldness to break free from

the old and conventional methods, and to approach the elucidation of so-called supernatural problems on the lines of natural law” (2). Later he explains his unique position further: “In other sciences one reasons by analogy. Psychology is unfortunately a science with a future but without a past[.] ... [W]e stand today on the frontier of an unknown world, and progress is the result of individual effort” (7). Here Low espouses the very essence of the professional ideal, advancement for self and others through the perfection of one’s own profession and individual merit, and this ideology underlies his approach to his professional practice.

Low’s emphasis on the fact that psychology is “without a past” is key to understanding the use he makes of occult theory in his work. While psychology as a discipline may be of relatively recent origin, some of the things it studies such as abnormal states, experiences and perceptions are not. In order to assist psychology to progress, Low examines older, occult or folkloric explanations for these same states and begins to realise that through a combination of these older and different ways of knowing and scientific methodologies, he can take psychology in new directions. Although he writes the occasional report for the Psychological Research Society, he orientates his individual profession within the discipline of medicine:

the medical profession must always have its own peculiar offshoots ... some are trades, some mere hobbies, others, again, are allied subjects of a serious and profound nature. Now as a student of psychological phenomena, I account myself only two degrees removed from the ordinary general practitioner. ... The nerve and brain specialist is the link between myself and the man you would send for if you had a touch of lumbago ... Each division is but a higher grade of the same ladder – a step upwards into the unknown. I consider that I stand just one step above the specialist who makes a study of brain disease and insanity; he is at work on the disorders of the embodied spirit, while I deal with abnormal conditions of the free and detached spirit (“The Story of the Moor Road” 27).

Although Low acknowledges that some fields of inquiry are “mere hobbies” he is quick to distance himself from this category by going on to discuss his work in terms of

psychological practice. Moreover his conceptualisation of the medical profession as a tree that shoots branches upwards as it grows highlights Low's idea of scientific progress through growth and development of new ideas. His new approach to psychology builds upon those previously established and moves further into "the unknown". Low's professional status is also reinforced by the reputation he has developed as an expert in the field of unusual experiences. One ardent admirer goes so far as to tell a potential client, "The police and the doctors have done their living best over this business, and they're just where they were at the beginning. There's only one man in Europe can help you – Flaxman Low, the psychologist" (102). Although his expertise has won him renown and ensures a steady stream of clients, the detective neither seeks fame nor exploits his talents. The reader is assured: "A fixed aversion to notoriety is one of Mr Flaxman Low's most marked characteristics. Had this not been so, he would undoubtedly have formed the subject of many an interview in the illustrated magazines" (123). As a professional, Low does not "cheapen" his vocation by turning himself, or a case, into a spectacle. His clients are assured of their privacy in what may be delicate circumstances.

It is important that his chronicler feels the need to stress that "Mr Flaxman Low declares that only on one occasion has he undertaken, unasked, the solving of a psychical mystery" (51). Although the reason for this emphasis is never explicitly given, it is possible to surmise that Low wishes to distinguish his professional, scientific work from the activities of amateurs and hobbyists who seek out purportedly haunted areas for their own amusement. This interpretation is strengthened by his chronicler's later assertion that:

Although Flaxman Low has devoted his life to the study of psychical phenomena, he has always been most earnest in warning persons who feel inclined to dabble in spiritualism without and serious motive for doing so, of the mischief and danger accruing to the rash experimenter. Extremely few persons are sufficiently masters of themselves to permit of their calling in the vast unknown forces outside ordinary human knowledge for mere purposes of entertainment. (87)

Here again Low asserts his status as a professional, possessing the specialised knowledge necessary to deal with his investigations. Low backs up this assertion of the dangers of occult amateurism with a rather grisly tale of possession in “The Story of Saddler’s Croft”. Though Low himself is willing to venture into “the unknown” in order to further knowledge his training, the function of this story is to assert the importance of professionalism in the investigation of the supernatural. Interestingly, although it was the practice of the Society for Psychical Research to encourage contributions from the public of their own paranormal experiences and to offer no formal training for potential investigators of haunted houses, the reverse is true of contemporary occult organisations. Groups such as The Golden Dawn had elaborate systems of grading to ensure that occult knowledge and methods were only made known to those with sufficient prior training. Although this is often understood sceptically as a way of promoting the notions of “exclusivity” and “secrecy” that are ostensibly the mainstays of a “secret society”, it had long been the practice of occult and esoteric groups to promote a hierarchical approach in the access to knowledge for the protection of less experienced practitioners. The reality of the situation naturally depends on one’s point of view, but what is interesting in terms of this discussion is the ways in which this approach closely mirrors the ideas of professional associations that sought to restrict access to membership and further training to only those people whose previous training categorised them as “professionals” in the field. The middle-class attitude towards the professions as conferring special status on their members and ensuring a particular level of expertise or quality is precisely the same function that the “grading system” performs in occult organisations, ensuring a specific level of ability to both use and protect their specialist knowledge.

In addition to their training and status, the professional detectives are depicted as possessing particular personal qualities that likewise make them uniquely suitable for the work they perform. Prichard stresses Low’s rather cerebral physical appearance (“high forehead, long neck – with its accompanying low collar – and thin moustache” [4]), and his noted kindness to his clients. Moreover, like his creator, this psychic detective is also renowned for his athleticism, throwing the hammer for his college during his years at

Oxford. This seamless combination is evident in the reminiscences of his friend Sammy Smith:

Low was the sort of man one could rely on in almost any emergency. ... [H]e will always be remembered by the story that when Sands, of Queen's fell ill on the day before the 'Varsity sports, a telegram was sent to Low's rooms: 'Sands ill. You must do the hammer for us.' Low's reply was pithy: 'I'll be there.' Thereupon he finished the treatise upon which he was engaged, and next day his strong, lean figure was to be seen swinging the hammer amidst vociferous cheering, for that was the occasion on which he not only won the event, but beat the record. (4)

Well-educated, successful in his profession, a keen sportsman, and highly regarded by his peers, Flaxman Low is an "all-rounder", the epitome of British masculinity. "Athlete, Egyptologist, and psychical student, his is a strangely blended existence, at one moment breathing the mental atmosphere of the Sixth Dynasty, the next hour perhaps fighting single-handed some fearless battle against an opponent from whom the bravest need find no shame in accepting defeat" (123). The uncontested masculinity of Flaxman Low and the other professional psychic detectives is also intrinsically connected to their status as trained occultists, rather than "dabblers" in the mystical. As Alex Owen writes in *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (2004), the occult movement at the turn of the century was in some ways distinct from earlier interest in Spiritualism and mysticism, as it proposed a new mode of engaging with noumenal issues, a cerebral and disciplined methodology:

the appeal of the 'new' occultism was located in part in its distinctly robust characterization of the spiritual endeavor. In particular, an occultism that incorporated magical practice was established as an undertaking having to do with the exercise and assertion of the will. Willpower was closely associated with what Victorians referred to as the 'masculine temperament,' and the will was considered by many physicians to act as the guarantor of manly health and efficacy. ... [M]ysticism was associated with an emotionalism, a state of rapture, which did not accord with the intellect-driven will to know characterizing the magical endeavor. ... Magic and mysticism were in effect subtly gender coded, with magic – 'intellectual, aggressive, and scientific' – assuming a masculine status. (88-89)

Owen's characterisation of the "new" occultism as an intellectual training ground fits neatly with notions of the professional psychic detective as uniquely qualified and educated in ways that no amateur could claim. Flaxman Low, along with real-life nineteenth and early twentieth-century adepts, could boast both an understanding of the Other World and a mind perfectly trained in the methods of interacting with it. Similar to the discourses of "muscular Christianity" earlier in the century, a fitness of mind and body were linked. Occultists were frequently involved in discussions of new diet and exercise regimes such as vegetarianism, organic farming and Eastern meditation traditions. Poor nutrition and physical health were regarded as a hindrance to mental control and were thus strongly discouraged. Similarly a "decadent" lifestyle is not conducive to optimum magical practice, and none of the professionals in these chapters are ever seen engaging in excess or debauchery. In this way contemporary occult ideas are not only very similar to the ideals of British middle-class masculinity but also reflect ideas of the "new spirit" promoted by Havelock Ellis and others.

In addition to his occult training and physical qualities, Flaxman Low's dedication and sense of vocation are equally stressed. At a dangerous point during his investigation of the Grey House, Low rouses the courage of his companion by asserting: "If we lose our lives it will be in the effort to make another spot of earth clean and wholesome and safe for men to live on. Our duty to the public requires us to run a murderer to earth. Here we have a murderous power of some subtle kind; is it not quite as much our duty to destroy it if we can, even at risk to ourselves?" (56). Similarly, his dedication to advancing the understanding of science is continually alluded to: "there is no such thing as the supernatural, all is natural. We need more light, more knowledge" (96). In his effort to bring about these advances in knowledge, Low investigates the possible utility of older forms of knowledge that, to the layman would be considered merely folkloric superstitions. Low treats this "knowledge" (for example the idea that "bodies of suicides are known to be particularly susceptible to spiritual influences, even to the point of arrested corruption" [13]) like the accepted "laws" of science – hypothetical until proven by observation and experience. He goes to great lengths to ensure that material "proof" is

found at the conclusion of each case, even after the threat is neutralised and the clients are satisfied, so that his theory can be verified. It is important to Low to gain this physical proof, not just to convince his clients that what he suggested was true (they don't seem too concerned so long as their problem has been solved), but so he has a scientific basis for his own research. His aim is to construct a "body of evidence". Thus ancient skeletons are unearthed, mummies are uncovered and living corpses are revealed. Low even borrows a neighbour's camera in "The Story of Saddlers Croft" so he has visual evidence to offer his clients. Alternatively, as is the case in "The Story of Yand Manor House" and "The Story of Sevens Hall", he sometimes uses a process of elimination as proof, verifying his hypothesis by removing or destroying the suspect items (in these cases an exotic plant and some ancient portraits respectively), and documenting the results. If the disturbances cease it can be logically assumed that the artefact was indeed the mystical source of the trouble.

In one particular case, "The Story of Yand Manor House", Low goes so far as to invite a spectator along with him, a renowned French logician Monsieur Thierry, so he can examine the psychic detective's reasoning. Low displays a great deal of excitement at the chance to subject his work to further rational scrutiny: "To be associated with so brilliant a logician as yourself in an inquiry of this nature is more than I could have hoped for! The material with which I have to deal is so elusive, the whole subject is wrapped in such obscurity and hampered by so much prejudice, that I can find few really qualified persons who care to approach these investigations seriously" (64). Here again, the issues of qualifications and "seriousness" reveal Low's concern for his professional image and the status or reputation of the psychic detective profession itself. When Thierry responds at the successful conclusion of the case by remarking "In time, my dear Monsieur Flaxman, you will add another to our sciences. You established your facts too well for my peace of mind" (74), Low's methods have won over another "rational mind", establishing the validity of his work within the scientific frame of reference.

For Low, a key part of creating his new discipline is being able to promote its validity to a mainstream professional audience whose criteria for proof are typically

established along more traditional scientific lines. By promoting the more occult aspects of his methodology as simply a different form of science, he is able to gain the widest support for his ideas. The newer breed of scientists, predisposed towards experimental ideas, would already be comfortable with the notion of synthesising different approaches in order to obtain new understandings of the world and the more traditional scientists (and rational philosophers such as Thierry) will be won over by Low's physical evidence and empirical methods. Thus his "new" ideas are cleverly presented to gain maximum sympathy.

A more careful examination of this particular case will serve to demonstrate Low's typical methods, highlighting the ways in which his twin knowledges work together to offer a solution. In "The Story of Yand Manor House" Low is called upon to solve a case of a haunted dining room. Here the twist is that the "ghost" can be tasted and felt but neither seen nor heard. Through a minute physical examination of the space and a keen eye for items out of place, Low discovers two long, coarse black hairs attached to a mantle decoration. These provide the detective with his first clue since the only inhabitants of the residence are the owner Sir George Blackburton, with short sandy hair, and his elderly grey haired maid. Later, while attempting to experience first hand the ghostly phenomena in the dining hall, Low is attacked and retains one of the "slashing implements" used upon him, "a long and thin object of a brown and yellow colour and twisted like a sabre-bladed corkscrew" (71), which he deduces to be an overgrown fingernail.

These material clues, coupled with Low's specific interest in more esoteric laws and processes, furnish the detective with a theory. He approaches Blackburton with a very Holmesian query:

who lived in this house for some time prior to say, 1840? He was a man ... who was deeply read in ancient necromancy, eastern magic, mesmerism, and subjects of a kindred nature. And was he not buried in the vault you pointed out? ... He was, I imagine ... hirsute and swarthy, probably a recluse, and suffered from a morbid and extravagant fear of death. (72)

Naturally Low is not surprised to find that he has perfectly described Blackburton's cousin, and a brief survey of the family vault reveals that the corpse in question, yet to decompose, sports long, ragged, dark hair and fingernails. Here the evidence is found to support the detective's theory. Exposure to the sunlight disintegrates the corpse in the manner of a vampire, and the case of the haunting is solved. This case provides a perfect example of how Low tests older folkloric knowledge (vampire lore) along with occult notions such as the manipulation of life force to see if it is of use in explaining modern phenomena. In order to do so he conducts a thorough examination of physical evidence but is guided in his search by the occult hypothesis. In this way Low's research methodology can be considered inductive rather than deductive: he generalises universal principles from specific instances. However, the fact that he forms his hypotheses based on his studies of ancient texts, folklore and commonly taught occult principles suggests that he is searching for "modern" confirmation of events commonly recorded in other sources and thus deduces that the current even may be of a similar type. Low then proceeds to test his deductions empirically.

Like the amateur detectives discussed in earlier chapters, Low cleverly interprets the physical clues he encounters in his investigations. In "The Story of The Spaniards, Hammersmith" an unusual spectre that seems to be carrying both a walking aid and a bladder on a stick is revealed to be the ghost of a leper through Low's clever technique of producing imprints of the ghost's footsteps by spreading loose sand along the passageway, an act reminiscent of Holmes' predilection for investigating footprints in the mud and snow. Innovative devices and methods such as this one come to be the specialty of psychic detectives who cannot rely upon standard equipment and must fashion the tool to suit the task. Like all scientists involved in cutting-edge research or "new" disciplines, the professional psychic detective must often invent new equipment and processes to further their study.

In spite of the unusual cases he investigates, rational, logical process and observation forms the backbone of Low's detective methodology. When confronted with a seemingly disconnected series of clues, Low declares:

These are isolated facts, we must look for the links which lie between. Suppose a saddle and a horse-shoe were to be shown to a man who had never seen a horse, I doubt whether he, however intelligent, could evolve the connecting idea! The ways of spirits are strange to us simply because we need further data to help us interpret them. ... [S]uppose we deal with this affair as it stands, on similar lines, I mean on prosaic, rational lines, as we should deal with a purely human mystery. (7)

In two cases, "The Story of No. 1 Karma Crescent" and "The Story of Konnor Old House", Low does find himself facing a "purely human mystery" and his rational methodology easily unearths the real causes of the trouble (Chinese smugglers and poisonous luminescent fungi!). Low does not presume to see ghosts where there are merely shadows. But in the cases where he does examine, explain and ultimately conquer a supernatural threat, the "entities" are depicted as largely instinctual: the ghost of the leper is doomed to repeat his tragedy; the Elemental seeks life-force as a source of sustenance; the killer-vine reacts to the seasons. In the cases where there is a malicious human, now deceased, at the root of the problem, it is the remnant of their will and personality that is leaving its imprint on the site; there is no real sense in which they are present, immediate or aware. In this series of tales the supernatural acts along predictable lines. There is no evil mastermind, no Dracula or Dr Jekyll. Low's is not a battle of wits but an investigation into new "natural laws". Though he does destroy supernatural entities, they are not depicted as consciously working evil but are like dangerous natural predators that humans must learn to understand, avoid or repel.

Thomas Carnacki

Twelve years later, in 1910, the Thomas Carnacki stories were published by William Hope Hodgson (1877-1918). Unlike Hesketh Prichard's, Hodgson's work is still widely recognised today. He is primarily known for his "weird tales" with a science

fiction flavour. Particularly popular are the quasi-apocalyptic novels *The House on the Borderland* (1908) and *The Night Land* (1912), as well as a series of maritime horror tales, of which *The Boats of the Glen Carrig* (1907) and *The Ghost Pirates* (1909) are the best known examples. While these stories remain in print and are frequently anthologised in science fiction collections, Hodgson's series of psychic detective tales *Carnacki, the Ghost Finder*, first published in the periodical *The Idler* in 1910 (and in an abridged version later that year, followed by a more complete edition by Eveleigh Nash of London in 1913,² are more difficult to obtain and seldom alluded to in critical volumes.³

Hodgson's style is quite different from that of Hesketh Prichard, or indeed any of the other psychic detective writers. Primarily a science fiction novelist (a disciple of the scientific and futuristic writings of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne), Hodgson's short stories lack the stamp of polished plotting and characterisation usually evident in other writers long accustomed to tailoring their work to the periodical press. Though his style is perhaps less engaging (*Carnacki* is arguably less likable than his associates, there are certain gaps in the narrative logic and the stories tend to lack suspense) Hodgson makes up for what he lacks in style with imaginative scenarios and innovative solutions. In fact this sums up Hodgson's professional detective, *Carnacki*, as well as it does his writing. *Carnacki* himself could be said to lack polish. He is abrupt, recalcitrant and stubborn. Dodgson, his friend and chronicler, admits that "Carnacki was generally secretive and

² The 1910 abridged version includes shorter versions of "The Gateway of the Monster", "The House Among the Laurels", "The Whistling Room" and "The Horse of the Invisible". These tales have been abridged by eliminating the inter-story narration in which *Carnacki* gathers his friends to dinner, making the whole text read as a single story. The 1910 edition also contains a poem written by Hodgson entitled "Lost". The 1913 Eveleigh Nash edition re-instates the inter-story narration and includes two stories absent from the first edition: "The Thing Invisible" and "The Searcher of the End House". The American Mycroft and Moran edition published much later in 1947 includes three more stories: "The Haunted Jarvee", "The Find" and "The Hog", but these stories are believed to have been composed at a similar time to those published in the first addition. All subsequent editions include the full versions of all nine stories.

³ In spite of the relative scarcity of editions, the *Carnacki* stories retain a cult following among devotees of Hodgson's work, and science fiction readers more generally. In 1992 A. F. Kidd and Rick Kennett published a collection of short stories entitled *No. 472 Cheyne Walk* (the address of *Carnacki*'s home and laboratory). This collection of new *Carnacki* stories picks up on hints of untold cases in Hodgson's work and is imitative of the style of the original.

curt, and spoke only when he was ready to speak” (“The Thing Invisible”15). Clients come to him through word-of-mouth, and following the resolution of a case it is Carnacki’s habit to gather his friends Jessop, Arkright, Taylor and the narrator Hodgson at his Chelsea home for dinner and discussion. In spite of his gruff manner, Carnacki’s listeners are fascinated by their friend’s use of arcane knowledge and his own technological inventions to combat supernatural problems.

Carnacki’s methodological process is different from Flaxman Low’s. Where Low uses his occult knowledge to provide a basis for his scientific study of the supernatural phenomena he encounters, Carnacki uses his scientific knowledge and technical skills to create more effective and efficient apparatus for dealing with supernatural manifestations. This is not to say that Carnacki’s means of detection are not methodical or rational; he is frequently seen sealing rooms with lengths of ribbon and human hair to prevent tampering and to tell if anyone were to “venture into the room in the dark with the intention of playing the fool” (“The Gateway of the Monster” 39). Similarly he is known for his patient searching of a site (sometimes taking up to a month for an investigation) but these are preliminary measures taken to ensure that the manifestations are indeed of supernatural origin. Once this is determined and trickery ruled out, it is the way Carnacki confronts the supernatural with technology that sets him apart as a professional psychic detective. This is Carnacki’s contribution to the forging of a “new” approach to the supernatural. Though he is not as focussed on establishing his work as a legitimate, professional science as Low, he nevertheless takes pride in his innovations and the ways in which he can use new technology to help others.

Like Hodgson himself, Carnacki is a keen and talented photographer. The camera has had an interesting relationship with the paranormal since its use became popular in the late nineteenth-century. Spirit photography is one obvious example of the instrument’s adaptation for Spiritualist purposes. Believed to produce “scientific evidence” the camera was used as a means of proof or validating claims of the

paranormal, or of debunking them, and as such became one of the primary tools of the psychic investigator. One of the ways Carnacki uses his photographic equipment in an investigation is to obtain evidence regarding the precise nature of the phenomenon:

I fixed up my camera and flashlight opposite to the door of the Grey Room, with a string from the trigger of the flashlight to the door. Then, you see, if the door were really opened, the flashlight would blare out, and there would be, possibly, a very queer picture to examine in the morning. (“The Gateway of the Monster” 42)

However, Carnacki is not limited by the technical constraints of ordinary photography. His experiments in “Lightless Photography”, prompted by contemporary developments in X-ray technology, make use of an unexposed plate to capture a spectral image. Even more imaginative are Carnacki’s adaptations of photographic equipment for other purposes. His pride and excitement regarding his technical innovation is obvious in “The Hog” as he describes his use of modified photographic equipment to record the sounds a client experiences while dreaming:

a long roll of specially prepared paper ribbon in place of a film or plates. By turning the handle the roll passed through the machine exposing the ribbon. ... Lifting the exposed spool of paper ribbon out of the camera I laid it horizontally in the two “rests” that I had arranged for it on my modified gramophone. Where the paper had been acted upon by the varying coloured lights which had appeared on the disk, the prepared surface had risen in curious, irregular little waves. (161)

The gramophone is fitted with a “beautifully made metal-filament brush” (162) instead of a needle, thus playing the “sounds” recorded in light.

Carnacki does not limit himself to photographic equipment in his investigations. He has a specially constructed “experimenting room” in his house that “measures thirty-nine feet by thirty-seven, and has a plain board floor over which is fitted a heavy, half-inch rubber covering” (“The Hog” 159). His laboratory is equipped with a variety of unusual devices including “a specially made camera, a modified form of phonograph

with ear-pieces instead of a horn, and a glass disk composed of many fathoms of glass vacuum tubes arranged in a special way. It had two wires leading to an electrode constructed to fit round the head” (“The Hog”160). Carnacki also makes use of microphone and voice-recording technology: “when the whistling commenced, I made a microphone test. You see, if the whistling were mechanically produced, this test would have made evident to me the working of the machinery, if there were any such concealed within the walls. It certainly was an up-to-date method of examination” (“The Whistling Room” 80). He is evidently very proud of his use of modern technology, convinced of its usefulness when investigating the supernatural. In this Hodgson is expressing not only his own excitement regarding the possibilities of modern technology but also that of his pre-war contemporaries. Although following the First World War people would come to question the destructive effects of technological innovation, at the time when these stories were published, faith in the enormous potential of technology was perhaps at an all-time high.

Carnacki’s true innovation lies in his ability to design (or redesign) devices to incorporate occult theories of correspondence,⁴ and it is perhaps the invention of the “electric pentacle”, a scientific device built upon occult principles, for which he is most distinguished. As he explains to his friends at dinner:

I came across Professor Garder’s ‘Experiments with a Medium’. When they surrounded the Medium with a current, in vacuum, he lost his power – almost as if it cut him off from the Immaterial. That made me think a lot; and that is how I came to make the Electric Pentacle, which is a most marvellous ‘Defense’ against certain manifestations. I used the shape of the defensive star for this protection, because I have, personally, no doubt at all but that there is some extraordinary virtue in the old magic figure. Curious thing for a Twentieth-century man to admit, is it not? But, then, as you all know, I never did, and never will, allow myself to be blinded by

⁴ The theory of correspondences is a basic tenet of most occult or esoteric doctrines as well as most major religions. Simply put, it suggests that objects, pictures, symbols, colours etc have particular power based on the ideas that they correspond to. For example particular colours are said to have the power to affect mood or redirect energy so are used in decoration or worn to enhance these properties in the area or individual. In some Christian traditions the colours of the priest’s robes and the church’s décor change depending on the church calendar. Originally these colours were selected for the particular links they had to the events and themes of the Biblical year.

the little cheap laughter. I ask questions and keep my eyes open.
("The Gateway of the Monster" 45)

The pentacle as a symbolic protection against evil is a well known device, but this is taken to a new level by Carnacki who constructs the sign out of electrical tubing to be laid on the floor, battery operated, so it cannot be smudged out like the typical chalk inscription. Though he admits the uninitiated would consider the principles of his invention to be based on anachronistic or superstitious beliefs, like Low, Carnacki understands the value of synthesising older knowledge forms with more modern processes to achieve progress in innovation.

An adaptation of the electric pentacle is Carnacki's "spectrum defense" consisting of "seven glass vacuum circles with red on the outside, and the colour circles lying inside it, in the order of orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet" ("The Hog" 160). It too is a fascinating mixture of contemporary science, mysticism and occultism. The detective explains that this defence is really "a kind of colour organ upon which I seem to play a tune of colour combinations that can be either safe or infernal in its effects. You know I have a keyboard with a separate switch to each of the colour circles" (163). The "colour organ" itself is not an invention of Carnacki's. This device, a kind of musical instrument that associates each colour of the spectrum with a note in the musical scale, was first suggested by Sir Isaac Newton in *Opticks* (1704), and later built by the Jesuit priest and physicist Louis Bertrand Castel in 1730. From the late 1870s renewed interest in this process was sparked by Bainbridge Bishop, who created a colour organ that could be attached to pipe organs to project coloured displays onto a screen when notes were played. With the increasing use of electricity in the 1890s, the British painter Alexander Wallace Rimington modified the colour organ to perform light shows at his public performances, attracting much publicity and generating interest among the general public and the musical world alike.

Like the methodologies of the professional psychic detectives generally, the theory behind these two electronic devices is a strange mixture of the scientific and the occult. Nineteenth-century science had made enormous progress towards understanding

the physics of light and varieties of energy and the ways in which these energies are transmitted via vibrations and waves,⁵ and modern physics undoubtedly influences Carnacki's methodology. However equally important to the detective is the recommendation from the occult Sigsand manuscript to use the colour blue for protective work (as blue is "God's own colour"), and the widespread use of the pentagram in occult ritual. Throughout the series Carnacki is as just as likely to be found using more traditional magical paraphernalia as tinkering with his photography equipment or working on his physics prototypes. He can be observed sweeping with a "broom of hyssop", drawing chalk circles and pentacles, hanging garlic, drawing symbols with specially prepared mixtures, lighting candles, consulting the Sigsand Manuscript and performing the Saaamaaa ritual. But even his occult work has the air of an exact science:

I got my tape measure then, and measured out a circle thirty-three feet in diameter, and immediately chalked it out. ... [E]ach candle measured approximately one inch in diameter, it took sixty-six candles to complete the circle; and I need hardly say that every number and measurement has a significance. ("The House Among The Laurels" 61)

Carnacki sees no distinction between the two forms of knowledge, using them interchangeably and in unusual combinations. For example the detective is rather matter-of-fact in his manner of disposing of an offending mystical object in "The Gateway of the Monster": "I had with me an oxy-hydrogen jet, and two cylinders, containing the gases. ... Five minutes later the Luck Ring, once the 'luck', but now the 'bane', of the Anderson family, was no more than a little solid splash of hot metal" (54). The thrill, for the detective at least, is the element of uncertainty that surrounds a case before all the elements have been uncovered. Once the nature of the disturbance is revealed, the problem is dealt with swiftly. In this way Hodgson effectively removes much of the terror of the supernatural from the narratives. If a cursed ring can be destroyed by a commonplace oxy-welder it suggests that all that is needed to face such things is professional know-how, which is exactly what Carnacki and his colleagues offer. If you

⁵ See for example the work of Heinrich Hertz who successfully demonstrated the existence of electromagnetic radiation in 1888; Nikola Tesla's experiments with alternating current electricity and wireless communication in 1893; and Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen's successful work with x-rays in 1895.

have legal issues you hire a lawyer, if you have paranormal problems employ a psychic detective.

When faced with a new case Carnacki's methodology is quite similar to Flaxman Low's. In "The Gateway of the Monster", after receiving a letter from a man named Anderson, Carnacki visits his home to inspect the Grey Room, a bedroom in which strange phenomena occur each night: the doors slam and the bedclothes always end in a tangled mess on the far side of the room, and three people have reportedly been strangled within its walls. On arrival, Carnacki's first action is to inspect the room, sealing all the doors and windows with lengths of ribbon, and running it in complicated patterns along the floor (in later cases he uses human hair for this purpose) so he can tell the exact position of any nocturnal disturbances. The detective's process is reminiscent of modern crime scene procedures, sealing a site so as to protect any available evidence. Carnacki takes the added precaution of sealing all the doors in that wing with wax so he can tell if any door slams in the night. The following morning Carnacki spends hours examining the room and its contents, inch by inch, with a magnifying glass, probing between the floorboards and ceiling and sounding the walls with a hammer. The bedclothes, found in a crumpled mess in the corner, are the subject of further detailed examination. All but one of his seals have remained intact, proving that it was the bedroom door that had slammed in the night. At this point Carnacki's penchant for photography comes into play. Rigging his lens and tripod so as to flash whenever the door is opened, he hopes to obtain a picture of whatever manifestations might inhabit the room.

Having done all he can to obtain any physical evidence or clues, the next step in the detective's detailed investigation is to spend a night in the haunted room. Here Carnacki demonstrates his occult training by employing traditional protective paraphernalia: garlic, candles, sigils, and the recitation of words of power. Carnacki believes it is this combination of methods that keep him safe: careful investigation, attention to detail, the electronic device and the mystical ritual. Using these in conjunction Carnacki manages to cover all possibilities, both prosaic and metaphysical. The night spent in the room allows him to witness the manifestation and to discover its

source: a small ring hidden under a floorboard (indeed the detective appears to have checked the floor rather less thoroughly than he initially believed!), and this malignant force is summarily destroyed by an oxy-welder.

Perhaps some of Carnacki's pragmatism is the result of his experience in "debunking" supposed hauntings. Of the nine stories Hodgson wrote about him, only four involve genuine supernatural elements. In the other five, the detective manages to reveal fraudulent or unintended natural causes for the events through the use of sophisticated equipment and painstaking attention to detail. As he explains to his chronicler at the beginning of a new case: "the care I take at this period is extreme; for I have solved hundreds of cases of so-called 'hauntings' at this early stage, simply by the most minute investigation, and the keeping of a perfectly open mind" ("The House Among the Laurels" 60). His attitude towards his work is also revealing:

I am as big a skeptic concerning the truth of ghost tales as any man you are likely to meet; only I am what I might term an unprejudiced skeptic. I am not given to either believing or disbelieving things 'on principle', ... I view all reported 'hauntings' as unproven until I have examined into them, and I am bound to admit that ninety-nine cases in a hundred turn out to be sheer bosh and fancy. But the hundredth! ("The Thing Invisible" 16)

This self-professed scepticism, cultivated in the absence of proof, may perhaps go a way towards explaining the merging of scientific and occult methodologies in Carnacki's work. Because at the beginning of a case the involvement of the supernatural is still unproven, he must firstly use his scientific knowledge to determine the nature of the agency at work. Once the supernatural element is confirmed, Carnacki brings his special apparatus into play to destroy the threat.

This emphasis on "destruction" is interesting since, in the tales where he does encounter the supernatural, the phenomena are portrayed as conscious entities but without a higher intelligence or organisation. In fact Carnacki treats the supernatural entities he encounters as uniformly evil, referring to them repeatedly as "ab-human", "disgusting

thing[s]” (122), “hideous things” (126) and “outer monstrosities” (86)⁶, describing them as causing a “feeling of spiritual sickness, as if some delicate, beautiful, inward grace had suffered, which is felt only upon the too near approach of the ab-human” (50). To Carnacki these entities are Other and his attitude is reminiscent of the worst Victorian racism: “I realized that the room was full of an abominable silence ... [a] sort of purposeful silence, just as sickening as any of the filthy noises the Things have the power to make” (77). Carnacki classifies supernatural entities into two types, the Saiitii, a “living spiritual fungus, which involves the very structure of the ether-fiber itself” (86) and the Aeiirii a more harmless, semi-materialised force. In this way, Hodgson’s depictions of supernatural creatures and events are reminiscent of Machen’s, in that he chooses to focus on negative rather than “helpless” or pitiable entities (or predominantly mindless ones as is the case with Low). However, unlike Machen, whose narratives serve as specific warnings against spiritual ignorance and materialistic arrogance, Hodgson’s horrific entities are constructed in direct contrast to powers that seek to *protect* humanity from these “outer monstrosities”. In the conclusion to “The Whistling Room” Carnacki assures his friends that “it is being proved, time after time, that there is some inscrutable Protective Force constantly intervening between the human soul (not the body, mind you,) and the Outer Monstrosities” (86). In Hodgson’s fiction in general,⁷ humankind is placed in the middle of a cosmic tug-of-war between destructive and protective forces. Though he never really explains why this might be the case, Hodgson does emphasise the importance of protecting the soul from the grasp of the horrific Saiitii through the use of a combination of ancient and modern techniques, in order to ensure the most up-to-date and effective methods of protection. Hodgson’s aim in these stories is to promote a sense of cosmic wonder and a consideration of man’s place in the universe rather than a specific religious (or esoteric) doctrine but, in the Carnacki stories, he does seem to inject his own fascination and excitement regarding modern technology and new scientific theories suggesting that they may provide for not only social progress but individual meaning.

⁶ This latter term is reminiscent of American author H. P. Lovecraft’s creations, the Cthulu.

⁷ See in particular *The House on the Borderland* (1908)

Though there are obvious differences between the motivations and methods of Flaxman Low and Thomas Carnacki, both approach the supernatural using a mixture of scientific and occult methodologies. In spite of their methodological and ideological differences, both detectives are self-consciously “professionals” taking pride in the ways their work adds to and advances human knowledge, and fulfilling their duties with a sense of vocation, always willing to help those in need, and to see the case through to its conclusion, regardless of the personal dangers or difficulties involved. This professional ethos is also evident in the character of Norton Vyse, who brings to his work a particular psychic skill: psychometry.

Norton Vyse

Rose Champion de Crespigny’s creation Norton Vyse featured in six stories⁸ published in the *Premier Magazine* in 1919. These tales had never been collected into book form until Ash-Tree Press undertook the project in 1999, and little is known of de Crespigny’s life,⁹ apart from her involvement in post-war psychical research following the death of her husband. It is on record that she served as President of the Leeds Psychic Research Society and of the Reading Society for Psychical Research as well as Chairman of the British College of Psychical Science, and wrote on psychical and spiritualist matters for contemporary periodicals such as *Nineteenth-century*. One such article, “The Cosmic Law in the Atonement”, outlined the vibrations and dynamics that affect both the natural and spiritual worlds, a topic of particular relevance to her psychometric detective. De Crespigny is also known to have written a number of light social comedies and detective stories, all of which are no longer available outside the original periodicals.

Norton Vyse both lives and receives clients at his home in Bedston, a relatively remote area of the English countryside where he is able to wander his spacious gardens

⁸ The Norton Vyse stories, in order of appearance are: “The Moving Finger”, “The Shears of Atropos”, “The Villa on the Borderive Road”, “The Witness in the Wood”, “The Case of Mr Fitzgordon”, and “The Voice”.

⁹ For this biographical information I am indebted to Jack Adrian’s 1999 introduction for the Ash-Tree press edition of *Norton Vyse: Psychic*.

and indulge his pet peacock. His study is “lined with books on science, philosophy, and religion” (26), suggesting the diversity of his interests and hinting at his belief in the synthesis of different knowledge forms. Like the other professional psychic detectives, Vyse is described as having a “presence”, something in his appearance and demeanour that affects those around him. In this case it is Vyse’s eyes that dominate and provide a window to his personality:

They were curious eyes, grey, and very transparent, oddly light in contrast with his dark hair; there was a great peace that seemed to radiate, and steadfastness that gave the impression of something to cling to. No one could look into Norton Vyse’s eyes without wishing to look again. Kindly, sympathetic, with a hint of hidden things carefully guarded, and yet in them a question – the eternal question; the eyes of the inquirer to whom there is no finality, no possibility of fear, no disturbance of the peace passing understanding. (4)

Much attention is paid to Vyse’s eyes. They are described in each story, in varying ways, but their dual traits of intelligence and kindness, of deeper knowledge tempered by tolerance are always emphasised. Like Low, Vyse is characterised as the epitome of British masculinity and a perfect “adept”. His is a “balanced” character in which intelligence and empathy, the rational and the irrational work in unity.

Vyse’s particular skill is psychometry, the ability to touch an object and be able to tell its history. However this kind of psychic ability, often associated with fortune telling, is here explained in scientific terms with the aid of current theories of molecular physics. Since de Crespigny goes to great pains to outline the exact nature of Vyse’s special abilities in minute detail in “The Moving Finger”, the first tale in the series, I will reproduce her theory of psychometry in its entirety:

All matter – so called- is vibrating, from the electron upwards; that is the conclusion of the most modern of scientists quite apart from the ‘hidden knowledge’. The differentiation of matter is merely a question of the varying rates of vibration. Our five senses are tuned to

receive, and respond to, vibrations within a certain limit at both ends of the scale. Your sense of touch, for instance, records the fact that ether vibrating at a certain rate results in what we call water, fluid and unstable; that at a lower rate it becomes solid in the form of ice; at a higher rate it eludes your sense of touch altogether. Can you not imagine a more sensitive sense than yours might still register vibrations to which your own are unresponsive? It would be no more unbelievable than the sense of smell in a dog as compared with that of a human being. ... Besides the physical senses, we also have latent the more subtly senses belonging to the inner bodies; most of us can develop them if we adopt the right methods, ... [f]or ordinary psychometry it is sufficient to suppose a brain with nervous centres so delicately poised as to be sensitive to vibrations too rapid for the normal brain to receive. ... In the case of the past history of an object, the brain, through the sense of touch, is responding to vibrations with which the object in question has come into contact and stored. ... Everything automatically records its own history. (5-6)

Vyse generally places the object he wishes to sense to his forehead as he claims that “a small gland, called the pituitary body, is situated there, which, in conjunction with the pineal gland ... has an important relation to the action of the inner senses” (15). The way that the process is described is particularly scientific in tone, shying away from any particularly “mystical” interpretations of Vyse’s powers. It is a case of hyper-sensitivity, a scientifically recognised condition, rather than a “supernatural” power. This adds to Vyse’s credibility as a professional. Since his skill is not something mysterious, just uncommon, he avoids accusations of charlatanism while at the same time using the rarity of his skill as a means of distinguishing himself from other investigators, making his services more valuable.

In addition to Vyse’s powers of psychometry, his understanding of the “less obvious laws of Nature” (57) allows him to provide assistance to those in need. As was the case with Flaxman Low, to Vyse all apparently “supernatural” occurrences (his preferred term is the “super-physical”) have very “natural” explanations. The difference between physical and super-physical laws is simply that the everyday person does not fully understand the principles governing the super-physical. Vyse bases his work on the assumption that “the laws connected with the next plane, and the more subtle form of matter that exists there, are just as orderly and as inexorable as the laws relating to

physical matter. Nothing can be accomplished except through obedience to them” (20). As Vyse’s practice is founded upon the reading and manipulation of vibrations, he is at pains to highlight the rational and scientific nature of his expertise:

Evolution advances by imperceptible stages, not flying leaps. The physical science of today will tell you the whole universe is in a condition of vibration, from the electron to each component part of the densest matter [...] ... Wireless telegraphy was once cut off from us by an infinitesimal vibration which has not proved insurmountable. Why should this other? (88)

By conceptualising his profession in terms of evolution, Vyse, like Low and Carnacki before him, emphasises the contribution he is making toward the progress of human understanding.

Vyse’s understanding of these laws and his psychometric abilities are not merely inherent; his “superior knowledge” is “born of long years of study and training” and he is willing to use this training to assist “less experienced souls confused by the working of laws they could not understand” (26). As is the case for professionals with specialist skills, people seek Vyse’s help on the strength of his reputation. For example, a typical request, received in the tale “The Villa on the Borderive Road” reads: “You are so well-known to me by name, and I have heard so much of your wonderful powers and knowledge about things which, I suppose, would be called psychic, that I feel if you cannot help me no one can” (33). In a later story, “The Witness in the Wood”, it is said that “Norton Vyse’s fame as a psychic of unusual powers had spread even to the out-of-the-way village of Lesser Hamberdene” (49). Like both Flaxman Low and Thomas Carnacki, Vyse exhibits a strong sense of vocation; his selflessness and dedication are evident:

So many strangers applied for interviews on the score of help needed and then used the time he had reluctantly spared to enlarge on their own experiences and views; ... [a]ll they wanted was so evidently a good listener. ... The knowledge, the powers born of stern self-repression, the fruit of years of arduous training, all were at the disposal of humanity at large; no thought of self, or personal advantage, or self-

indulgence, should ever be allowed to sully the fair shield of pure endeavour. (8)

In spite of de Crespigny's overblown phrasing, the sentiment of professional ethics and Vyse's devotion to his cause is clear in this paragraph. Vyse does not see his time as his own; he feels duty-bound to assist those who come to him, even if he may only offer a sympathetic ear. His devotion to his work comes at a personal cost, draining him of energy and diminishing his health: "his eyes ... looked tired; the lean, clean-shaven face, with its squarish chin, and lines that told of practised asceticism, was slightly drawn with an unwonted fatigue. There had been unusual drains on his vitality during the previous weeks, on the life energy he expended so freely in the cause of others" (49).

The necessity for Vyse's particular services is also evident in the earnest requests for help he receives, and the fact that his clients feel he is the only person qualified to assist them. His services as a professional are very much in demand in a world increasingly interested in, and tolerant of, Spiritualist theories and psychical explanations:

in a world at last realising its own limitations, Vyse was steadily coming into his own, the shaft of the old type of hidebound scoffer was falling short of the mark, and there was a growing tendency among people of intellect and standing, when confronted by any of the mysterious problems outside the range of ordinary dealings, problems which have arisen from time immemorial, to call for Norton Vyse. (50)

There are obvious similarities between Norton Vyse and his predecessors Flaxman Low and Thomas Carnacki: they are all well-trained in occult theory, believe that the supernatural should be dealt with in a rational, at times empirical manner, and feel that it is their duty and life's work to assist people with their problems in this line. But just as the precise methodologies and approaches of Low and Carnacki differ significantly, the way Norton Vyse deals with the cases brought to his attention differs from that of his professional colleagues. Vyse possesses a particular occult "power", a skill that enables him to gather information about a case in a way not available to other detectives. Psychometry provides Vyse with information that even his clients are not

privity to, or that they may wish to conceal from others. This unique insight into the situation coupled with Vyse's understanding of esoteric and occult matters combine to enable the detective to solve a case. His approach to problem solving is to use his occult powers to retrieve facts, then use his occult training to piece the facts together into a logical, reasoned explanation of events.

However, in most cases that is where his involvement ends. Unlike his colleagues Low and Carnacki, Vyse is a consultant; he is seldom found working in the field. In three of the six stories featuring the psychic detective, "The Shears of Atropos", "The Case of Mr Fitzgordon", and "The Voice", Vyse never leaves his office. In fact in these cases he doesn't even need to employ his skills at psychometry. He simply listens to the stories his clients tell him about their recent "supernatural" experiences, and he interprets them using his understanding of the "laws connected with the next plane" (20). In "The Moving Finger" and "The Villa on the Borderive Road" Vyse does leave his office, but only to let the villain know that he has been found out. In "The Moving Finger", the first of Norton Vyse's cases, the narrator is more concerned with introducing the skills of his protagonist than any very complicated plotting. There is no supernatural threat but the reader is introduced to Vyse's psychometry skills through the detective's success in preventing an unfortunate marriage.

In "The Villa on the Borderive Road" Vyse uncovers a plot to use an unwitting medium to frighten a young woman out of her inheritance. Although this story does involve supernatural manifestations (a ghost does indeed haunt the Villa, his presence given strength by the proximity of the medium), he detects the plot through a series of letters; he never visits the actual site of the disturbance or meets with his correspondent. Vyse does nothing to the supernatural entity itself, just exposes the plot and removes the medium. Unlike Carnacki, he does not view the supernatural as malignant or disgusting. What his clients see as supernatural, Vyse believes is part of the natural world.

The one case in which Vyse does conduct an investigation at the site of a supernatural event is "The Witness in the Wood". In this story Vyse receives a letter from

a Mrs Deane, who has heard of the investigator by reputation, and asks that he help investigate the death of her gardener's daughter. The fifteen year old girl is found dead, presumably of fright, near a pool in the nearby woods, a spot at which numerous other deaths have occurred throughout the centuries. These deaths have occurred in two main ways, either a woman walking alone dies of heart failure, or a murder occurs at the site. After interviewing the household, Vyse examines the site. His method of investigation involves seating himself on a boulder near the pool where the girl was found and reading the vibrations: "Vyse was apparently lost in thought, his hand moving restlessly over the moss-stained surface of the grey boulder, his eyes fixed on the dark splash of water" (55). With characteristic wit he subsequently declares that "we ought to apologise to the pool ... it has been much maligned" (56) and returns to Bedston, promising to research the site and inform the clients of his findings. In fact, Vyse's deductions in this case owe a little to his "sensitivity" and a little more to acute observation and research, but they are mainly the result of his understanding of the workings of psychic phenomena. He discovers that the stone on which he had been seated was used in ancient times by pagans as an altar-stone, and had been the site of animal and human sacrifices. Since "[e]very action, every vivid thought leaves its mark behind it in the ether – its special vibration" (54), the stone had retained an "evil" influence that temporarily possessed those in its vicinity; its removal and destruction would cause the events at the site to cease. The important thing about this particular case is not Vyse's rather predictable explanation, but the action he takes when he realises his clients may be in danger. Learning that the young girl and her fiancé plan to spend an evening at the pool in an effort to disprove the existence of any "supernatural" influence, Vyse, who had returned to London to research the history of the site, rushes back to the country and arrives just in time to stop the man, now possessed by the vibrations of the stone, from shooting his fiancée. In this situation the usually distant Vyse takes direct action in a manner more characteristic of Low or Carnacki.

Though Vyse generally performs the role of occult consultant rather than field agent, he is still committed to proving to the rest of the world the "truth" and "value" of his approach. Like both Low and Carnacki, Vyse sees his science as progressive, arguing

that: “[t]here were men of so-called common sense who said we should never fly. If we had to listen to them, we never should have. . . . To me the obviousness is all the other way. If you don’t seek, you won’t find” (64). He continues:

Scientists themselves are admitting the probable fact of this interpenetration of a more subtle world that clairvoyants have known for a long time. Is it not reasonable to suppose . . . that in a scheme of evolution governed by immutable law through all its phases, it is open to man’s will and intellect to conquer secret after secret till he wins his way into the holiest aspects of the higher planes? . . . [C]ommunication with the next plane is one of these riddles, just another step on the ladder of scientific discovery. (71)

The merging of scientific and occult methodologies is what links the three psychic detectives discussed in this chapter, but what is evident is the range of professional approaches employed. Low’s hands on research, Carnacki’s technological design and Vyse’s work as a consultant highlight different types of professional work emerging at the turn of the century. The investigations that each detective undertakes are represented as being akin to the practice of anthropology, in which a foreign world is explored and explained using a set of methodological tools. While, as we have seen, the precise methodology differs from one professional to another, the variations are predicated on the foundation assumption that scientific and occult approaches must be used in unison to produce optimum results.

The variety of approaches, and the emphasis on scientific research evident in the case histories of these professionals, does raise the question to what extent the epithet “detective” still applies to these characters at the turn of the century? A detective can be defined by his commitment to problem solving, generally on the behalf of a client, and the “rational” nature of their investigative process. Each of the characters examined in this chapter are professional problem solvers, undertaking investigations on behalf of those in need of assistance, and as is evident in an examination of their methodologies, their approach to problem solving is both rational and effective, and I would argue that the designation of “detective” still fits these characters. What is significantly more questionable is the extent to which the stories examined in this chapter conform to the

“Gothic” label. While a number of supernatural entities appear - vampires, ghosts, elementals, revitalised mummies and the rest - the power of these entities to frighten or unsettle readers is systematically undermined by the way they are described, explained and dealt with by the detectives.

The emphasis that each of the detectives places on the rational, predictable and ultimately knowable nature of the supernatural, essentially dispels any real sense of mystery or uncanniness. Humans do not tend to fear that which they understand, and by rendering the supernatural explicable, the detectives reassure their clients, and by association their readers, that the supernatural is in fact little more than a poorly understood part of the natural world. This is emphasised by the way these detectives choose to eschew the term “supernatural” in favour of a nomenclature that reinforces the rational, logical and above all natural nature of these phenomena. Though some of the events that occur in these stories may be frightening, the overwhelming tone of the narratives is one of optimism for their new sciences, and the thrill of discovery. Moreover, by utilising a mixture of scientific and occult methodologies they are promoting a view of both the supernatural and the occult as something that is not alien or dangerous, merely poorly understood. These stories contain the not-so-subtle message that such a methodological merging is actually the way forward and is full of exciting possibilities.

Alex Owen writes that “occultists themselves epitomized an unbending faith in rationality worthy of any Victorian proponent of scientific naturalism. They argued for the rationalist modernity of a theory and practice that refuted the concept of the supernatural and looked instead to the natural world for explanations of all things noumenal” (239). This is certainly borne out in a study of the methodologies of Low, Carnacki and Vyse. Through the merging of occult and scientific methodologies the professional psychic detectives traverse the boundaries between the rational and the irrational, the natural and the supernatural. In their own way, each of the professionals in this chapter refutes the very concept of the “supernatural”, arguing instead for an

understanding of the natural world that encompasses phenomena and entities that science is only just beginning to truly understand.

While the psychic detectives in this chapter investigate observable entities with an objective existence, those in the next chapter explore the possibility that the Self can also be a site of supernatural or occult processes. The “psychic doctors” John Silence and Dr Taverner examine the realm of the psyche, assisting patients whose “supernatural” experiences occur within.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PSYCHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

It is evident from the previous discussions of Flaxman Low, Thomas Carnacki, and Norton Vyse that even the professional psychic detectives do not form a homogenous group. The ways in which they approach their work, the methodologies they utilise and their attitudes towards the supernatural phenomena they investigate differ with their individual personalities and agendas. In this chapter the professional psychic detective will be seen in yet another guise, that of the psychic doctor. Although each of the detectives examined so far could confidently be referred to as a man of science, their approaches are arguably that of the scientific researcher, perhaps with an admixture of the anthropologist. The psychic doctors examined in this chapter, Dr John Silence and Dr Taverner, are first and foremost medical men. Where the previous professionals have clients, Silence and Taverner have patients; where the objects of investigation for Low, Carnacki and Vyse are external entities and the sites they “haunt”, for the psychic doctors the phenomena, while maintaining an objective reality, are primarily internalised experiences.

The function of the psychic doctor within society is also slightly different from that of the professionals in the previous chapter. It is the difference between a researcher and a therapist. Low, Carnacki and Vyse are all committed to assisting their clients, even to the extent of endangering their own lives in the process, but what they are investigating and defending against is an external entity, coming from a source outside the subject affected. In the case of the psychic doctors, their patients suffer from personal, internal or interiorised problems that form a kind of psychic affliction. The “site” of investigation for these professional psychic detectives is no longer a haunted house, or a disturbed patch of ground; the “supernatural” is to be found within the individuals themselves. The client, or in this case the patient, has become the “site” of the disturbance, and what is at stake is the individual Self.

This theme had become a common one by the turn of the century. Particularly evident is the notion of Self as Other which features in the popular use of the *doppelgänger* motif where the terror of the supernatural is not inflicted from without; it emerges from within. There is a shift in the ideological framework of the supernatural story from the threat of something happening *to me*, to a fundamental fear that something is happening to *me*, a movement from fear of the Other to a fear of the Othering of the Self. A well-known example of this trend in popular fiction is Stevenson's, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Initially an external trigger is utilised, in the form of Jekyll's mysterious "powders", but eventually the manifestation of the "double" refuses even this artificial control, appearing at will. In spite of his later horror and repudiation of the acts committed by his double, Jekyll still asserts in his testimony, written at the very end of his life, that he was "no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering" (81). His self is fluid, diverse and, although in his case it manifests as a double, he argues that there is in all probability no limit to the number of authentic selves a person may comprise, suggesting that "man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens" (82).

By the 1880s, psychology as a discipline had begun speculating on older philosophical concerns regarding the connections between mind and matter, between thought and reality and the conscious and unconscious aspects of the human mind. Thus in his recent article "Incongruous Compounds: Re-reading *Jekyll and Hyde* and late Victorian Psychology" (2006) Michael Davis argues that in this period "the connection between physical and mental being comes under renewed scrutiny ... producing a move away from reductive physicalism similar to that on which Freud was soon to insist". Although Freud's theories, later to have such an enormous effect on psychology and literature alike, were known mainly to specialists before the outbreak of the First World War, Freud was certainly not the first theorist to raise such matters in the British context.

James Ward, for example, in his article on “psychology” for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1885, claims that psychology’s purpose is “to analyse and trace the development of individual experience as it is for the experiencing individual” (in Hicks, 3). This shift in focus from objective diagnosis to subjective experience is important because it facilitated increased discussion regarding the unconscious and perhaps undiscovered aspects of the human mind. The concept and function of the unconscious mind had been discussed by William Hamilton as early as the 1850s, but at that time his work was regarded more by philosophers and metaphysicians than by the scientific psychological community. William James, brother to the novelist Henry, along with well-known continental philosophers such as Swedenborg, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, discussed various aspects of the mind/body dualism and the inner life of man and its relationship to outside forces, and British intellectuals and writers from the late nineteenth century onwards were well-versed in their theories. New terms were coined to explain age-old phenomena. For example the notion of “unconscious cerebration” was used to refer to the phenomena associated with dreaming, trance-states and somnambulism (and is mentioned in *Dracula*). Similarly, the concept of “spectral illusion” which is essentially seeing something that someone else cannot, or that is not objectively present, became a common term to describe Spiritualist experiences. These phenomena were of widespread interest, not only to practicing psychologists, but also to psychical researchers, concerned with investigating apparently supernatural events and abilities.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the Victorian fascination with Spiritualism, Theosophy and Eastern mysticism had also reached its zenith by the turn of the century, bringing with it a widespread interest in the powers of the mind and trance-states manifested by mediums, the relationship between the mind, body and spirit as seen in discussions of astral projection and out of body experiences, and the possibility of life after death. In 1903 the enormously popular book *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, by psychologist and founding member of the Society for Psychical Research Frederick Myers, was published posthumously. This text offered extensive case studies of many of these unconscious and spectral experiences, and “real” cases such as

these, and the theories purporting to explain them, were widely reported in the popular press. Although the Spiritualists had been popularising notions of spiritual states for decades, and the Society for Psychical Research had spent much of the time since its inception studying such claims, it too had begun to alter its focus by the turn of the century, perhaps influenced by the popularity of the “new occultism” which placed far more emphasis upon subjective states of being and the powers of the individual mind, and was at times rather critical of the passivity and unreliability of Spiritualist phenomena. Thus it was that the Society turned far more attention to studies of phenomena of the mind and the Self, a trend followed by writers of popular supernatural fiction.

So it is that at the beginning of the twentieth century two new and distinct strands of the “supernatural” tale emerge, altering the source of fear from an external monster to an internal threat. The first of these narrative strands is an updating of the play on the reality of the supernatural, popular in Gothic novels in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where the reader is initially unsure whether events have a natural or supernatural cause. But where in the Gothic tradition this uncertainty arises from the possibility of trickery and deceit, and is always uncovered by the end, in the late Victorian period, what Julia Briggs refers to as the “psychological ghost story” emerges, in which the perceptions of the protagonist are questioned as a result of their own uncertain mental state. In these stories the ghosts may or may not be real depending on whether the reader feels the narrator’s mental state can be trusted; no definitive “reality” is ever produced. For these tales, point of view is all-important. Instead of focusing on an objective reality, subjective experience is highlighted.

Perhaps the best example of this type of story is Henry James’s well-known novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), in which the governess believes her pupils to be corrupted by the ghosts of former servants, but as there is no-one else who is able or willing to admit to seeing these ghosts, we are never sure if they have an independent existence or are merely the product of the governess’s fevered imagination, a monomania or obsession. She takes great pleasure in her role as protector of the children, but the

reader can never be ultimately sure whether in her desire to do good, she creates an imaginary evil with which to do battle. Likewise, in Walter de la Mare's later novella *The Return*, published in 1910, the protagonist and narrator Arthur Lawford believes he has been possessed after sleeping on the tomb of a French pirate. He feels that his face has changed and his wife confirms this, but neither Arthur nor the reader is sure whether his alteration is the result of a nervous illness or something more sinister. What follows is a series of often lengthy conversations between Arthur, his doctor and his friend concerning the nature and cause of this change. A sharp distinction is made between alteration to the body and changes to the self, the doctor arguing that "the mind, the self's the thing" (34), as Arthur begins to understand "how tenuous, how appallingly tenuous a hold we every one of us have on our mere personality" (31). He questions "are we the prisoners, the slaves, the inheritors, the creatures, or the creators of our bodies? As for identity or likeness or personality, we have only our neighbours' nod for them, and just a fading memory" (90). Later in the story, when the resemblance fades, Arthur and his friends cannot say that they did not imagine it altogether. S. T. Joshi describes the core of de la Mare's story as the "existential horror of losing control of one's own being" (Introduction v).

The second strand of supernatural fiction that takes up the notion of the Self as a site of contention includes tales such as Stevenson's and the cases of the psychic doctors. In these stories there is no real question as to the objective reality of the "supernatural" phenomena. The psychic doctors and their patients believe that the supernatural exists, and although pseudo-scientific explanations may be given, the manifestations of the supernatural remain internal and it is the self that must be examined and treated. It is this work that is undertaken by the psychic doctor.

Julia Briggs explains the advent of the psychic doctor in terms of a secularisation of what would have once constituted a spiritual crisis:

In the past the chief wielders of spiritual power – the clergy or the ‘white witches’ – had commonly been called upon to exorcise evil spirits, but by the nineteenth-century people who saw what others couldn’t were more often referred to doctors, though only too often doctors in turn were helpless in the face of such difficult and as yet inadequately classified symptoms. The psychic doctor fulfilled in fiction a need that was strongly felt in fact, by providing psychic or psycho-therapy before the advent of the analyst. (*Night Visitors* 60)

Although Briggs’s assertion that these fictional characters were created before the “advent of the analyst” is misleading (the “analyst” is certainly a familiar figure by the time Dion Fortune publishes her work), she is nonetheless accurate in identifying a trend within supernatural fiction at the turn of the century in which notions of the supernatural are closely aligned with the emerging psychological sciences and the associated discourses of the fluidity of the Self. The psychic doctors examined in this chapter are a mixture of the priest and the medical man, a new type of professional necessary in a society where traditional religion was increasingly viewed as unable to combat the difficulties faced by a Self under threat.

This trend towards focussing on the inner-life of protagonists rather than the external trappings of scene and narrative is one of the features that make these texts “modern”, yet it does raise some important questions about the relationship between individual psychology and ideas of “progress”. The tendency to focus inwards can suggest an individualistic, egotistical approach that is in many ways “anti-progressive”. By the early twentieth-century many writers, particularly those that would come to be associated with Modernism, had moved away from the Victorian trend of message-focussed fiction that explored various social “issues” through narrative. For example, in the essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” Virginia Woolf expresses an opinion characteristic of the “moderns” that the function of literature “is to express character – not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire” (324). Of the works of H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy, who she considers typical of the older writers, Woolf remarks:

I wonder if we are right to call them books at all. For they leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something – to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque. That done, the restlessness is laid, the book finished; it can be put upon the shelf, and need never be read again. . . . [T]he Edwardians were never interested in character in itself; or in the book in itself. They were interested in something outside. Their books then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them, actively and practically, for himself. (326-327)

From this it is easy to see how the Modernist perception of character as a more important aspect of literature than narrative or social message could be construed as anti-progressive. However, in these psychic detective narratives, the internal lives of characters are examined towards a certain end, rather than for the sake of character study alone.

The Self is indeed multifarious and complex, but these stories go beyond the depiction and examination of a self in conflict, they attempt to solve the conflict itself. This is not to suggest that the psychic doctors promote the outmoded concept of a single self, on the contrary they encourage their patients to explore their selves in their various manifestations. But, in the end, it is the role of the psychic doctor to help their patient achieve a kind of harmony between selves, a recognition that these differences do not need to be suppressed, repressed or defeated, just accepted, accommodated and integrated into their self-concept. In the case of *Silence*, this often occurs through teaching his patients how to control their own Selves so that they have an active rather than passive role in their own self-development. This is a significant departure from Gothic representations of the divided Self (such as *Jekyll and Hyde*) as a conflict between a good Self and an Other or *doppelgänger* that needs to be overcome or defeated. One of the major themes of these psychic detective narratives is the acceptance (even the promotion) of difference and alternative modes of being. It is only when the patient is unaware of how and why they are experiencing these issues that there is danger. Once the psychic doctor has guided their patients through a process of realisation and acceptance, they are able to go on with their lives, often richer for the experience. Perhaps the most significant

difference between Modernist character studies and the stories examined in this chapter is the fact that these characters are not alone. They seek professional help in examining their inner lives, and as a consequence are made aware of the possibilities for progressing through their current difficulties. There is a distinct pro-psychology undercurrent to the tales of the psychic doctors, emphasising the wider shift towards professionalism.

John Silence

Dr John Silence and Dr Taverner, appearing in the first decades of the twentieth century, are not the first characters who could be described as psychic doctors. In the 1872 collection *In a Glass Darkly*, Sheridan Le Fanu introduced the “medical philosopher” Dr. Martin Hesselius (who is arguably also the first professional psychic detective in fiction), a medical man who chooses to practice “metaphysical medicine” (5). The five stories in the collection are presented in a fashion that would later be associated with Sherlock Holmes, as “case studies” offered to the public by a loyal and trustworthy assistant. In the first of the Doctor’s cases, “Green Tea”, Hesselius is really little more than an observer in the case, explaining the experiences of his client but not being able to assist in his salvation. The same can be said of the next story in the collection, “The Familiar”, and for the remaining three stories, “Mr. Justice Harbottle”, “The Room in the Dragon Volant” and the famous vampire tale “Carmilla”, Hesselius is little more than a brief framing device used to tie the collection together. Hesselius proves an interesting study since Le Fanu’s character was the first of his kind, and in many ways was a few decades ahead of his time. While his concept of the psychic doctor is original, Le Fanu’s character was little more than a framing device, and remained just a taste of things to come.

In 1908 Algernon Blackwood returned to Le Fanu’s concept in creating his own psychic doctor, John Silence. Although Blackwood admits that Silence originated as an homage to Hesselius, Briggs is correct when she points out that: “In general Silence emerges as a rather different figure from Hesselius – gentler and more approachable, and

far more English. When Le Fanu was writing it was no doubt still necessary to convey a ‘Germanic’ atmosphere if a character was to be considered ‘deep’ and knowledgeable about strange psychological states. Silence on the other hand is very much an Englishman, a gentleman who loves outdoor life” (*Night Visitors* 62). Silence is indeed cut from the same masculinely English cloth as the detectives discussed in the previous chapter. He too is a proponent of the “new occultism” that advocated the powers of the individual psyche and the importance of health, discipline and mental control.

The John Silence collection originated almost accidentally, as Blackwood had not originally intended to write a whole series of stories involving Silence. However in an effort to provide a coherent “link” between the stories in his new collection, some of which contained Silence, the premise of the psychic doctor seemed a useful device, and was an obvious developmental step from the Jim Shorthouse stories (a recurring character who, like the “hobbyists” in Chapter Three, enjoyed investigating haunted houses) which were published in *The Listener and Other Stories* the previous year. As this decision necessitated a rewriting of the tales from which Silence was absent, the resulting collection is “uneven” regarding the extent of the doctor’s involvement in each case. The first of Algernon Blackwood’s John Silence stories was published in 1908 in a volume entitled *John Silence, Physician Extraordinary*. Dr Silence was initially called Dr Stephan in the draft that Blackwood showed to his publisher Eveleigh Nash. It was Nash who suggested the more mysterious name “Silence”, perhaps with a forward eye to promotional possibilities. The publisher undertook a large advertising campaign for the new book, with posters “on the buses” and throughout London featuring the slogan “JOHN SILENCE – the Most Mysterious Character of Modern Fiction” and an illustration of the enigmatic doctor. Blackwood dedicated the book to “M. L.W.¹ the original of John Silence and my Companion in Many Adventures”, but the identity of this “original” has never been definitively identified. In his biography of the author Mike Ashley suggests the most likely candidate is Mary Waldegrave, the wife of Blackwood’s good friend Edwyn Robert Bevan. However, although Edwyn and Mary went on many holidays with Blackwood (including the camping trip that inspired the story “The

¹ Blackwood’s earlier collection *The Listener* (1907) was also dedicated to the mysterious M. L. W.

Wendigo”), there is no real sense in which Mary could be considered the original of the psychic detective, and the real M. L. W. remains a tantalising mystery.

John Silence: Physician Extraordinary contained five stories in the following order: “A Psychological Invasion”, “Ancient Sorceries”, “The Nemesis of Fire”, “Secret Worship” and “The Camp of the Dog”. The order of the tales within the finished collection reflects not the order of Blackwood’s composition but an attempt to distribute and develop the character evenly throughout the collection. It seems likely that “Ancient Sorceries” and “Secret Worship” were initially conceived as stand-alone stories. In “Ancient Sorceries” Silence acts as little more than an interested listener as a friend describes a singular experience he had while travelling through France. The detective is used as a framing device only; he is mentioned at the beginning to establish the narrative context and interjects periodically so as to remind the reader of his presence. At the close of the traveller’s narrative we are told that Silence subsequently undertook some investigation into the matter, but his actions in this respect are outside the narrative frame. “Secret Worship” is essentially the story of a man returning to visit his old school, only to discover it has been taken over by devil worshippers. Silence, who just happens to be travelling in the area, saves the man from being used in one of their dark rituals. The psychic doctor has evidently been added to these stories as an afterthought in an effort to link the volume together. In the three remaining stories, “A Psychological Invasion”, “The Nemesis of Fire” and “The Camp of the Dog”, Silence takes an active role as a psychic doctor, assisting his clients with the supernatural problems they bring to him.

In 1917 a further John Silence case, “A Victim of Higher Space”, was published in a collection of Blackwood’s short stories, *Day and Night Stories*, by London’s Cassell. This tale was not of later composition; it had been cut from the first edition just prior to publication, being considered “too weak” (Ashley 131).² For the first edition (and all

² Ashley also suggests that “A Victim of Higher Space” was actually the first story written featuring the psychic doctor but was excluded as it was more “theoretical than practical” (131) and shows the doctor with a different assistant.

subsequent editions have maintained this order), “A Psychological Invasion” is the story that introduces the psychic doctor to his readers. We are told, for instance, that

By his friends John Silence was regarded as an eccentric, because he was rich by accident, and by choice – a doctor. That a man of independent means should devote his time to doctoring, chiefly doctoring folk who could not pay, passed their comprehension entirely. ... [T]he cases that especially appealed to him were of no ordinary kind, but rather of that intangible, elusive, and difficult nature best described as psychical afflictions. (1-2)

Silence’s unique training in both conventional medicine and occult practices enabled “this singularly developed doctor ... to select his cases with a clear knowledge of the difference between mere hysterical delusion and the kind of psychical affliction that claimed his special powers” (3). These powers are not inherent. Like other professionals, Silence has undergone significant training:

In order to grapple with cases of this peculiar kind, he had submitted himself to a long and severe training, at once physical, mental, and spiritual. What precisely this training had been, or where undergone, no one seemed to know, - for he never spoke of it, as, indeed, he betrayed no single other characteristic of the charlatan, - but the fact that it had involved a total disappearance from the world for five years. (2)

Clients come to Silence when they fear that other professionals would not believe them or worse, mistake their metaphysical problems for psychological ones and threaten incarceration. Mainstream religious outlets seem similarly incapable of providing spiritual assistance. As the wife of one client remarks, “[h]e tried some clergymen and religious people; but they *know* so little and have so little intelligent sympathy. And most of them are so busy balancing on their own little pedestals” (5). Given Blackwood’s personal attitudes towards Christianity, comments such as these are not surprising, and serve to reinforce the idea that not only spiritual fulfilment and growth but also help and personal progress can be facilitated by alternative spiritual systems.

All of the cases this psychic doctor treats have a significant interior component that impacts on the patient's understanding of Self. In "A Psychological Invasion" Felix Pender realises that his actions (experimental drug-taking) affect his interior world and open him up to the possibility of other Selves influencing him. Though this story does seem to stress a clear opposition between Self and Other, it is only with Silence's help that Pender is able to realise he is actually being "influenced", learn the causes and how to prevent them. This case, like that of "A Victim of Higher Space" where the patient learns that, although his Self exists in a variety of dimensions, he can choose which space he inhabits, is really about choice and control. Experimentation with alternative Selves is encouraged but disastrous consequences occur when the experimenter does not have sufficient skill to navigate the dangers. This message is reinforced by another two cases "Ancient Sorceries" and "Secret Worship" in which the patients nearly die as a result of dangerous hallucinations. For these men the inner Self is a dangerous place, where past lives and associations can cause unusual experiences. It is their inability to realise that what they are experiencing actually originates in their mind, and that they must assert control over their mind in order to protect themselves that is the cause of the trouble.

In all of these cases Silence is able to rescue the patient before irrevocable damage is done, and explain to them various realities (some of which are psychological and some more occult or mystical) about the mind and Self. The fact that all of these patients need Silence to help them out of the problems caused by their experiments or inability to realise potential dangers, serves to reinforce his role as a professional, for what he has and can teach his patients, is control. His own occult and psychological training has taught him the importance of mental discipline and control, not to close the mind from development and cut the Self off from progress, but to enable such progress to occur safely and under the most favourable conditions. He does not tell Felix Pender not to take drugs, nor Racine Mudge not to explore Higher Space. Rather he ensures they have a sufficient understanding of the workings of the inner world to make informed decisions.

In “The Camp of the Dog” Silence explores a different aspect of the Self from those discussed above. In this story, rather like those involving Doctor Taverner discussed later in this chapter, Silence helps a young man integrate various aspects of his Self into a harmonious whole. Like the patients in the previous stories, he too lacks control over the internal mechanisms of his psyche, but for him control alone is not the answer. To be happy, and to protect those around him, he must come to terms with repressed aspects of his Self, accept them and move forward.

“The Camp of the Dog”

“The Camp of the Dog” concerns a group of friends on a camping trip amongst the islands to the North of Stockholm, a location which had particular resonance for Blackwood as he and some friends rented the island of Ängsholmen for a month in the Spring of 1908 (Ashley 132). Events are narrated by Hubbard, who is Silence’s assistant, and although the psychic doctor is not one of the original camping party, he is soon called in when a mystery presents itself. In words reminiscent of the author’s own views, Hubbard asserts that in this wilderness “lay the spell of haunting peace, remoteness from the turmoil of the world, and the freedom of open and desolate spaces” (173). In short, it is a place where people can be themselves, and become “characters stripped of the atmosphere of men and cities ... people who would drop all disguises and henceforth reveal themselves as they really were” (174).

In this natural space where the Self is free to find its natural or authentic expression, Peter Sangree, a young divinity student, falls in love with his tutor’s daughter Joan, a nymph-like woman very much at home in the woodland setting. It is suggested that here in the wilderness she has found her true Self, seeming to become “a natural and genuine part of the landscape ... Here she was at home; in London she became someone concealed by clothes, an artificial doll overdressed and moving by clockwork, only a portion of her alive. Here she was alive all over” (175). Joan recognises the changes within herself, suggesting “I feel all untied in a place like this; the rigidity of one’s nature begins to melt and flow” (180). But it is not only Joan who finds new aspects of her Self

emerging in this setting. Sangree realises something unexpectedly fierce has surfaced in his nature, and the narrator notices that “something oddly concentrated, potent, collected, had come into the expression usually so scattered and feeble” (183). These changes are represented positively. Sangree seems more vital, healthy and masculine (he is earlier described as “delicate and sometimes looks like death” [179]), and Joan more free, animated and alive. This suggests the powerful effects of the natural setting, but more than that, it emphasises the fluidity of the Self. It is this fluidity that becomes the focus of the story.

Soon Joan is disturbed by a large dog scratching at her tent and the camp is slowly terrified by the nocturnal visitations of a beast that can never be found during the day. At the same time she notices and fears the changes she observes in Sangree: “In town I was hardly conscious of his presence. But the moment we got away from civilisation, it began to come. He seems so – so *real* up here. I dread being alone with him. It makes me feel that something must burst and tear its way out” (180). Something is indeed tearing its way out of Sangree. When the mysterious dog is seen emerging from his tent in the early hours of the morning it becomes evident that the young man, unbeknownst to himself, is in fact transforming into the dog each night, prowling around the tent of the woman he loves. It is at this point that Hubbard calls for Silence, who travels to the island to investigate.

After talking to and observing Sangree, Silence confides in Hubbard his diagnosis: “what we have to deal with here is nothing more than a werewolf – rare enough, I am glad to say, but often very sad, and sometimes very terrible” (204). Silence’s sympathy for the man is evident from the beginning. When Sangree, still unaware of his condition, refers to the “dog” as a “poor starved beast” (205), Silence realises that the werewolf is an expression of the man’s own suppressed nature, that he too is “starved” and seeks unconsciously what his conscious Self is afraid to admit wanting: Joan’s love and compassion.

The Doctor explains the werewolf manifestation as Sangree's "Double ... his etheric Body of Desire, or astral body, as some term it" (207):

the fluidic body of a man has the power under certain conditions of projecting itself and becoming visible to others. ... [T]his fluidic body can, under certain conditions, assume other forms than human, and that such other forms may be determined by the dominating thought and wish of the owner. For this Double, or astral body ... is really the seat of the passions, emotions and desires in the psychical economy ... it can often assume a form that gives expression to the overmastering desire that mould it. (213)

Blackwood is not the first to have associated lycanthropy with astral projection. In "The Astral Plane"³ C. W. Leadbeater suggests that "there are certain circumstances under which the body may be seized upon ... and materialized, not into the human form, but into that of some wild animal – usually the wolf" (Leadbeater in Bourgault Du Coudray 60). Symbolically, the figure of the werewolf also emphasises the theme, common in Blackwood's work, of the relationship between the natural world and the urban environment. In her detailed study of the werewolf in literature and film, Chantal Bourgault Du Coudray notes that historically "the symbiosis of human and wolf in the figure of the werewolf has presented the opposition of nature (represented by the wolf) and culture (represented by the human)" (3). This opposition is clear in "The Camp of the Dog" but such oppositions are bridged in the narrative through the intervention of the psychic doctor.

Silence emphasises that the manifestation of the Double is "hardly ever deliberate. It is the desires released in sleep from the control of the will finding a vent" (214). This suggests that, in spite of the importance of "self-control" preached by Silence and other mouthpieces for the "new occultism", there is a distinction between having mastery over the Self and suppressing aspects of it. It would seem that the message is that it is only through a thorough knowledge and recognition of all aspects of the Self that one can truly progress towards Self mastery. It is the difference between conscious and unconscious direction of forces that is the critical point. Thus the aim of Silence's intervention

³ Published in *Transactions of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society* 24 (April 1895)

[i]s not to quench this savage force, but to steer it better, and to provide other outlets. This is the solution of all these problems of accumulated force, for this force is the raw material of usefulness, and should be increased and cherished, not by separating it from the body by death, but by raising it to higher channels. (217)

That night Hubbard watches as Sangree transforms. The description of the moment of transformation is revealing, as it highlights the nature of the incident as a shifting or dividing of the Self, rather than the imposition of a force from beyond: “the creature seemed somehow to melt away into him, almost as though it belonged to him and were a part of himself” (202).

For, after all, it was Sangree – and yet it was not Sangree. It was the head and face of an animal, and yet it was the face of Sangree: the face of a wild dog, a wolf, and yet his face. The eyes were sharper, narrower, more fiery, yet they were his eyes – his eyes run wild; the teeth were longer, whiter, more pointed – yet they were his teeth, his teeth grown cruel; the expression was flaming, terrible, exultant – yet it was his expression as I had already surprised it more than once, only dominant now, fully released from human constraint, with the mad yearning of a hungry and importunate soul. It was the soul of Sangree, the long suppressed, deeply loving Sangree [.]. (223)

This time, Sangree’s cry is answered by Joan in a trance-state induced by Silence, indicating where her true desire also lay. This fulfilment of suppressed desire satisfies Sangree’s inner Self and there is no longer any need for the manifestation of the Double. Instead, these more virulent passions are integrated into himself, and he is able to move on with his life, whole.

This emphasis on discovering the authentic Self and assisting a patient to discover who they truly are through encouraging the integration of various aspects, is the cornerstone of another psychic doctor, whose cases were published almost two decades later. Though similar to Silence in his ideas, Dion Fortune’s character Dr Taverner is less of an interventionalist in his approach, preferring to allow his patients to cure themselves under his watchful eye.

Dr Taverner

Dion Fortune, whose real name was Violet M. Firth, is perhaps better known for her occult work than her fiction. A member of the Golden Dawn, she later became the founder of her own occult group, The Society of the Inner Light, in 1922, the same year that the Dr Taverner stories were first published in the *Royal Magazine*.⁴ Initially she trained as a psychotherapist through the University of London but gave it up in 1916 in favour of occult pursuits.⁵ To her both disciplines had much in common: “We can define occultism as an extension of psychology, for it studies certain little-known aspects of the human mind and the mind side of Nature. Its findings, rightly formulated and understood, fit in with what is already established in psychology and natural science” (*What Is Occultism?* 10). Moreover she suggests the use of both in tandem as a method of therapy:

it may very well be that in the possibilities of ritual magic we shall find an invaluable therapeutic agent for use in certain forms of mental disease; psycho-analysis has demonstrated that these have no physiological cause, but it can very seldom effect a cure. It is here that the occultist with his knowledge of the hidden side of things can teach the psychologist a very great deal. (26)

The character of Dr Taverner is partly based upon Fortune’s mentor in occultism, the Irish Freemason Theodore Moriarty, but also upon her conception of the ideal Adept or Initiate:

He is instructed to live an abstemious and simple life, but not an eccentric one... He is distinguished from the unenlightened, not by his clothes and personal habits, but by his mentality. Two qualities characterise him, his serenity and his courage; these are the *sine qua*

⁴ In all there are twelve stories concerning Doctor Taverner. They are, in order: “Blood Lust”, “The Return Of The Ritual”, “The Man Who Sought”, “The Soul That Would Not Be Born”, “The Scented Poppies”, “The Death Hound”, “A Daughter of Pan”, “The Subletting Of The Mansion”, “Recalled”, “The Sea Lure”, “The Power House” and “A Son Of The Night”.

⁵ For a more in-depth account of Fortune’s Life see Alan Richardson. *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune* (1987).

non of an initiate. His training is designed to make of him a man of steel with a heart of compassion. (*What Is Occultism?* 191)

Taverner practices his own brand of psychology, an interesting mix of Jungian and occult theories. He believes in reincarnation and the Theosophical notion of the Akashic Records, a concept similar to the Jungian “collective unconscious”, where all knowledge and human experience (including details of past lives) is stored in the ether and can be accessed like a giant filing system by an appropriately trained person. Like the other professional psychic detectives, Taverner has received training in both mainstream and occult disciplines. In “The Return of the Ritual” we are given a staggering list of his academic credentials: he is a Doctor of medicine, philosophy and science, as well as a Master of Arts and a Bachelor at Law (38). We also learn that Taverner is an Egyptologist who specialises in the study of ancient mystery religions and a member of an international secret Brotherhood that teaches and polices the use of occult knowledge.

One of the things that sets Taverner apart from the other professional psychic detectives and even fellow psychic doctor John Silence, is that fact that he keeps not only consulting rooms but an entire nursing home where he can observe and treat his patients. It is situated near a desolate moor, but is described as being “in delightful contrast to the wild and barren country that surrounded it. The garden was a mass of colour, and the house, old and rambling and covered with creepers, as charming within as without” (11). Taverner’s nursing home is frequently compared favourably to more traditional asylums by emphasising the freedom that patients enjoy, their natural surroundings, and the benevolence of Taverner himself who frequently charges well under the common rate of a private institution so he can “rescue” as many of the afflicted as he feels he can help. As his assistant explains,

Taverner’s work began where ordinary medicine ended, and I had under my care cases such as the ordinary doctor would have referred to the safe keeping of an asylum, as being nothing else but mad. Yet Taverner, by his peculiar methods of work, laid bare causes operating both within the soul and in the shadowy realm

where the soul has its dwelling, that threw an entirely new light upon the problem, and often enabled him to rescue a man from the dark influences that were closing in upon him. (11)

In the first of Taverner's cases, "Blood Lust", we are introduced to his new assistant Dr Rhodes, a more traditionally trained medical doctor who has recently retired from the army (a close echo of Watson from the Sherlock Holmes stories), who performs the role of narrator throughout the series. Rhodes is gradually educated in Taverner's methods; he is mentored and encouraged, and as the series progresses we see him begin to appreciate and eventually emulate Taverner's example. Though they encounter patients with a wide variety of psychological and spiritual afflictions, Taverner's method is usually the same: bring them to the nursing home, observe their behaviour, and encourage them to follow their natural desires to discover their true Selves. As Taverner explains to his new assistant,

I am afraid you will find my methods very different from the orthodox ones. However, as I sometimes succeed where others fail, I consider I am justified in continuing to experiment, which I think, Dr. Rhodes, is all any of my colleagues can claim to do. ... My chief interest lies in those regions of psychology which orthodox science has not as yet ventured to explore. If you work with me you will see some queer things, but all I ask of you is, that you should keep an open mind and a shut mouth. ("Blood Lust" 10)

Two cases in particular highlight Taverner's methods in assisting the development of the authentic Self. In "A Daughter of Pan" and "A Son of The Night" Taverner takes in patients at the request of their families but soon discovers that it is actually these families (along with more general social norms) that are exacerbating the problem. Though the cause of the unusual personalities in his patients can be seen as supernatural in origin, it is really their deviations from accepted standards of behaviour that cause concern. Unlike more traditional psychologists and asylum-keepers who considered unusual behaviour a sign of disorder, for Taverner the disorder lies in his patients' suppression of their true Selves. Once these restricted aspects of their personalities are given free reign, both patients end up very happy and content, able to go on with their lives without further assistance, supervision or concern. This is not to say that the

families are happy, but that is not Taverner's affair. From his perspective he has rescued these souls and given them a chance to reach their true potential.

"A Daughter of Pan"

In this story a woman brings her seventeen-year-old daughter Diana to Taverner, claiming she is "difficult" and fears "her mind is not developing properly" (121). Due to her peculiarities of temper she has always had "special governesses" and strict discipline but to her mother's dismay this regime seems to have curbed her "wildness and temper" but left her daughter "undeveloped". Though the woman is unable to explain her daughter's problem clearly, the description Rhodes gives of the girl provides a much more vivid picture:

Lank, mouse-coloured hair was wound round her head in heavy greasy coils; a muddy complexion, fish-like eyes, and a general air of awkwardness and sprawling limbs completed the unpleasing picture. . . . She reminded me of a caged lark in some wretched animal dealer's shop, its feathers dull with dirt and frayed with the bars, apathetic, unhealthy, miserable, which will not sing because it cannot fly. . . . Her personality displeased them, and they had effectually repressed it, but alas, there was nothing they could put in its place, and they were left with an unensouled automaton which they dragged off to alienist after alienist in the hopeless attempt to get the damage repaired while maintaining the conditions that had done the damage. (122-123)

As to whether or not he can aid his new patient, Taverner is cautious, explaining, "[t]hey have driven a square peg into a round hole with such determination that they have split the peg, but to what extent we cannot tell until we have got it out of the hole" (123). He goes about this process by letting his ward have her run of the nursing home. At first she is cautious, "[u]nnacustomed to this lack of restraint, she did not seem to know how to employ herself, and slunk about as if at any moment outraged powers might exact retribution for some misdeed" (124), but soon Diana begins to see to her own needs, burning the clothes she arrived in and outfitting herself in a green tunic and stockings from the costume box kept for the patients' recreational theatrical productions. She turns up for meals when hungry, bathes when she feels the need and generally keeps to herself

except for the friendship she strikes with Tennant, a suicidal returned serviceman who has a gift for music.

Once several weeks have passed in this manner Taverner indicates to Rhodes that it is time to take things to the next level: “I am going to try a very dangerous experiment. If I fail, there will be trouble, and if I succeed there will be a row” (132). This experiment involves taking Diana out into the woods on the night of the Vernal Equinox. Something approaches them,

a great streaming procession like an undisciplined army, passing across the sky. ... [W]ild, discordant music broke here and there from the motley rout. Furry snouts on human faces, clawed paws on human limbs, green, vine-like hair falling over flashing eyes that gleamed as green, and here and there, half-frightened but half-fascinated human faces. (134)

Diana is pushed out to meet Them, “her own people” (133). She goes with them, only returning to the nursing home every few days for food and to sit by the fire. It is only at this point in the story that we hear Diana utter her first sentence. She attempts to describe her experience to the Doctors saying, “They are my people, I have always belonged to Them but I did not know it, and now They have found me. I shall go back” (136). Diana proceeds to come and go as she pleases, learning from her people the aspects of her Self that had been previously denied, while at the same time using her new-found confidence to interact with the Doctors and other patients. The realisation that there are others like her triggers a hitherto suppressed energy. She demonstrates an amazing aptitude for drawing and begins to fulfil her promise as a woman:

with her new-found harmony had come the correlation of mind and body, the long limbs no longer sprawled, but had the grace of a deer’s. She was as friendly as a puppy where before she had been morose. ... Diana had found her place in the march of life. She was no longer the outcast, uncouth and unfriendly. Her spontaneous elfin gaiety, which she had brought back from the woods, was a charm in itself; the mouse-coloured hair had taken on a gloss and gleam of gold, the sallow complexion was nut-brown and rose-red, but her springing swaying movement, her amazing vitality, were her chief distinctions. (138)

She and Tennant become closer and he too begins to exhibit signs of life and energy. The two eventually marry in what Rhodes describes as “the queerest wedding I ever saw” (143) and Tennant’s face displays “a glory that never shone on land or sea” (144).

In this story we see a similar theme of the healthiness of nature as opposed to the stifling powers of civilisation that has been explored on previous occasions. Diana is, in her soul, a member of this strange clan of supernatural beings that inhabit the woods and it is only through recognising her kinship with them that she is able to grow and develop. Tennant too shares a connection with the woodland folk, but his is less tangible, manifested primarily in his music. Though Taverner had thus far been unable to relieve his post-war depression, Diana is able to offer a different kind of therapy (a sense of belonging) and ultimately assists in his regeneration. A similar situation of patient-turned-therapist occurs in “A Son of the Night” but in this case it is Rhodes who ends up realising his true potential.

“A Son of the Night”

This story begins in a manner similar to “A Daughter of Pan”, and is clearly intended to be linked to the earlier story through the closeness of the titles, but in this case the potential patient is a wealthy young man, Marius. His mother and younger brother attempt to have him declared insane, citing as evidence his strange behaviour and tendency to leave the house and live with the local peasants, performing ceremonies over their crops and conversing with the elderly workmen. In reality though, it is Marius’s refusal to sell the family land to pay off his mother and brother’s debts that is the real reason for their efforts to have him certified, a fact of which both Taverner and Marius himself are well aware. Knowing full-well that if he refuses to certify the young man, a less-scrupulous Doctor would soon be found who will, Taverner invites him to the nursing home as his “guest” thus keeping him out of the hands of his scheming relatives, while providing the doctor with a chance of studying this unusual young man.

During the initial interview Taverner hints to Marius that he is aware of the young man's secret, that he too is of the woodland race that had welcomed Diana. There is little detail given about this mysterious group, apart from the earlier descriptions, but a comment that Taverner makes as he drives Rhodes around the countryside on his first day may go some way towards an explanation.

“This is Thor's Ley, or field,” he said, as the blighted country unrolled before us. “The old worship is still kept up about here.”
“The Catholic faith?” I [Rhodes] inquired.
“The Catholic faith, my dear sir, is an innovation. I was referring to the pagan worship. The peasants about here still retain bits of the old ritual[.]” (“Blood Lust” 10-11)

This reference to contemporary pagan practices is reminiscent of Machen's stories of the little people, where the country folk still acknowledge and fear the fairies. In this case, the fairies seem less malicious and more concerned with their own way of life in the woods, only approaching human habitations to reclaim one of their own that has been born [we are never sure how] into human civilisation. Diana was one such child and it seems Marius is another, but where Diana is unaware of her heritage, Marius knows his people and performs their rites for the local peasants. His Self is less divided than Diana's was, his problem being his family's reaction rather than any internal struggle. Diana's family were pleased to see her go with her new husband and to be rid of her oddities; Marius's kin need him for his money, and he, in turn has a special connection with his own land:

I do not want the money. What I have, I give them already, but I will not part with the land. I draw my life from it. Take the land from me, take me from the land, and I tell you that it will not live – and neither shall I! (240)

Though Marius's Self seems to need little help from Taverner, throughout the series Rhodes has developed his own internal struggles. At the beginning he sees Taverner as a strange yet charismatic man who he is happy to work for. As their relationship progresses, Rhodes comes to understand and admire his mentor more and

more and begins to desire the development of his own latent abilities. Taverner realises the progress his associate has made, professing at one point:

You are coming along[.] ... When you first joined me, you would unhesitatingly have recommended bromide for all the ills the mind is heir to; now you recognized that there are more things in heaven and earth than were taught you in the medical schools. ("The Death Hound" 106)

Rhodes is drawn to Diana in the previous story, but comes to realise that she would not be a good "match" for him admitting "to part of my nature she called, but she did not call to the whole of me, and I knew that the best in me would remain unmated and unaccompanied if I were to join Diana" (141). With Marius it is a different matter, for their friendship (represented as strictly platonic) is one of equals. Marius is quick-witted and intelligent and takes on Rhodes as a "patient" (at Taverner's sly urging) in order to help him realise both sides of his nature: the civilised man of science and the more mystical nature-lover. When leaving his house initially Marius exclaims:

Come! ... Let us get out of this house of evil; it is full of cruelty. It is a prison. These people are not real; they cannot speak real words, for they are unensouled. Come, let us go away and forget them, for they are only bad dreams, But you (touching taverner) have a soul; and he (touching my shoulder) has also got a soul, though he doesn't know it. But I will give his soul to him, and make him know that it is his own, and then he will live, even as you and I live. (245)

This is precisely what Marius sets out to do, Taverner also encouraging Rhodes to "develop aspects of [his] nature that lie dormant, thereby rendering it incomplete" (250).

At this point in the story the focus shifts from Marius to Rhodes himself as he heads into London to attend a conference, but what he experiences there surprises him.

This was the first time I had been at a gathering of my own kind since I had joined Taverner, and I was looking forward to it keenly. Here, I felt, my foot would be on my native heath; with Taverner I always felt somewhat of a fish out of water. But, as the different papers were read,

and the discussions carried on, I found a peculiar sensation stealing over me. When I was with Taverner, my mind seemed to move slowly and clumsily by comparison; but by comparison with these men, my mind moved with a lightening speed and lucidity. ... Over my soul there came a sense of utter solitude as I moved among these, my professional brethren; I felt as if I were looking in at a window rather than sharing in the conference. Until I returned to my old haunts I had not realised how far I had come along the path that Taverner trod (254)

He realises that he can satisfy both aspects of his Self by following in Taverner's footsteps. His professional career and desire to help other can be fulfilled in his work at the nursing home, but if he agrees to train with Taverner's occult brotherhood (and spend time with Marius) he will also allow those suppressed imaginative and spiritual aspects of his inner Self to develop and grow. The reason that Taverner is such a good psychic doctor is that he brings psychological, medical and occult training to bear on the problem, thus effecting an all-round solution. Rhodes has learned that it is not sufficient to heal the body or artificially calm the minds of his patients with drugs; true healing comes from seeing the patient as a whole being and treating them accordingly. Thus broken, suppressed and divided souls can be helped by encouraging them towards inner unity and self-expression, a path Rhodes chooses to take in this, the final story.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the focus on the inner life of individuals in the stories of the psychic doctors does not preclude these narratives from also exploring ideas of progress, growth and development. The site of supernatural disturbance lies within the patients themselves and this imbalance, division or invasion must be addressed before the subject can regain a unity of Self. It is the opinion of both Blackwood and Fortune within these texts that the professional psychic doctor, being a combination of medical man and trained occultist is best able to assist people to achieve this goal. However, their selflessness and desire to help is but one aspect of their profession. Perhaps without even realising it themselves, both John Silence and Dr Taverner offer their patients more than their sympathy and their knowledge: they provide them with a role model of an harmonious, integrated Self to aspire to.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored a collection of little-known late nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts that together form a hybrid genre I have chosen to refer to as psychic detective fiction. It has been triggered by the fact that, though some of the individual texts that fall within the purview of this genre have been the subject of critical study in the past, they are typically understood within the discourse of a late nineteenth century Gothic Revival which emphasises the notion of cultural anxiety as the key component of fiction produced at this time concerned with or utilising the supernatural. Through analyses of a variety of psychic detective texts, this thesis has demonstrated that this emphasis, which privileges discussions of decadence, decline, and the anxieties surrounding changing understandings of sexuality, gender roles, race, class and empire, neglects significant other aspects of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British culture. Optimism and progress were also prevalent and significant components of the cultural consciousness during this period. This is not to say that cultural anxiety is not a component of these texts; rather that it is not the only register in which supernatural themes during this period can be understood.

Psychic detective fiction, with its emphasis on problem solving, assisting others, merging of alternative ways of knowing, professionalisation and the expansion of the Self, engages in complex ways with various progressive discourses at the turn of the century. It has therefore been the aim of this thesis not only to recover a number of critically neglected texts, but to reconceptualise them as contributing to our understanding of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century notions of progress. Progress is not a uniform nor homogenous concept and, as the thesis has shown, it manifests in a variety of different ways within psychic detective fiction. Not all of the authors discussed can be considered political progressives or liberals. In fact a number of them such as Machen and Doyle were politically conservative. Though some of the psychic detective stories engage with notions of welfare, altruism and social collectivity, others are progressive on a more spiritual level, concerned with notions of natural regeneration,

personal development and cooperation with other like-minded souls. Some of the stories contain elements that could be considered anti-progressive such as a veneration of various forms of primitiveness, anti-urbanisation, anti-science and a focus on the individual psyche. However, in spite of these elements, the narratives as a whole suggest the characters are looking forward, seeking ways of ensuring future progress by engaging in speculative and experimental activities.

As this discussion of psychic detective fiction demonstrates, one of the reasons for the progressive and optimistic tone of this hybrid genre is its association with turn of the century occult movements, which are surprisingly progressive in their outlook. Spiritualism, psychical research, Theosophy, and esoteric groups such as the Golden Dawn all promoted the reality of the Other World, a realm of possibility in which men and women were able to expand their horizons, learn about themselves and assist in guiding others along the path of spiritual progress. Essentially then, these movements (and their adherents) were focussed on ideals and their achievement, their popularity resting not only upon the declining influence of Christianity but also on the hope and feeling of actively moving towards “growth” that they provided members and practitioners. These elements can be found in psychic detective texts. In some, the detective is able to facilitate the increased understanding (spiritual and/or scientific) of themselves, their clients, and the paranormal entities they encounter. Sometimes they work towards the creation of “new sciences” that merge scientific and occult ways of knowing, offering the possibility of future advancements in our understanding of the external world and the human psyche. At other times the goal is to promote a more general method of social progress, such as those offered by a closer relationship with the Natural world. Regardless of the specific nature of the progress or advancement offered in individual stories, the genre as a whole is characterised by its focus upon these very qualities. Though the supernatural entities or events they depict may be sources of anxiety, this anxiety is not re-contained or overlooked in the text; rather it is faced head-on and resolved in such a way that subsequent progress is possible.

Psychic detectives are not an homogenous group. For ease of study, and based upon an understanding of the history of mainstream detective fiction, this thesis has divided them into two broad categories: amateurs and professionals. The difference between the two groups is one of training and vocation. As Victorian society became increasingly professionalised, what distinguished the professional from other men was his specialised training and sense of vocation. Regardless of their specific status, the psychic detectives are characterised by their ability to understand, “read” and interact with their physical and social environment. Whether the particular site of investigation is the home, the city, the country or the human mind and soul, these characters become experts in their field of study, sometimes reflecting the methodologies and perspectives of the new social sciences, other times acting as scientists engaged in expanding the boundaries of their disciplines. Though the amateurs and the professionals differ, they share a focus on problem solving and interpretation that distinguishes them from traditional Gothic heroes and emphasises their pro-active natures, which in turn decentralises notions of anxiety.

On a broader scale, this thesis has demonstrated how popular fiction engages with topical and important social, cultural and spiritual issues, and how popular genres change and develop over time just like their high-cultural counterparts. Furthermore, it has discussed the prevalence of progressive ideas in both the texts examined and contemporary society, suggesting the possibility of an important relationship between social discourse and popular literature that warrants further exploration. The implications of this study of psychic detective fiction are twofold. Firstly, if the broad ideological perspective of these works has been overlooked, perhaps it is time to revisit and re-evaluate the socio-cultural dimension of the Gothic and other forms of late Victorian popular fiction. Secondly, by demonstrating that popular cultural forms can share the epistemological and ideological complexity of high cultural works, it further problematises the relationship and distinctions between high and low cultural forms, suggesting that the broader function of popular fiction in the late nineteenth-century cultural context may also require further investigation. The closer analysis, revision and re-evaluation of psychic detective fiction that has been the focus of this thesis, is one step towards these larger considerations.

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