Victorian Cultures of Liminality

Victorian Cultures of Liminality:

Borders and Margins

Edited by

Amina Alyal, Susan Anderson
and Rosemary Mitchell

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0863-3
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0863-7

To Odile Boucher-Rivalain
in recognition of her vital part in forging links between
Leeds Trinity University and the University of Cergy-Pontoise, Paris
and making this volume possible

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface ix

Part I: Literary Liminality

Chapter One 3
Present Absence in *The Great God Pan*
Amina Alyal

Chapter Two 27
Mixing the Genres: Shifting Generic Borders in Thomas Hardy's Novels
Peggy Blin-Cordon

Chapter Three 37
The Haunting of William Morris's Unknown Church
Paul Hardwick

Chapter Four 49
Mirrors, Doors and Windows: Insights and Reflections on Narrative Strategy in Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*
Hannah Hunt

Part II: Envisioning Liminality

Chapter Five 65
Self-Extraction of the Best Self
Nathan Uglow

Chapter Six 87
On the Threshold of Art: Liminality in the Art of G.B. O'Neill
Rosemary Mitchell

Chapter Seven 107
At the Farm Gate: Decomposition, Decay and Destruction in Field and Farm in Victorian Britain
Karen Sayer

Chapter Eight 137
Borders and Margins?: Learned Societies, Imperial Administrators, Railway Engineers and the Formation of Discourses on Race, Imperialism and British Overseas Railway Building, 1840-1930
Di Drummond

Part III: Radical Margins

Chapter Nine 157
Harriet Martineau (1802-1876): “A Gentleman of the Press”
Odile Boucher-Rivalain

Chapter Ten 167
‘Hear, O our God! For we are despised’: The Faith and Politics of a Marginalised Methodist Preacher and Radical Activator, Benjamin Rushton of Halifax (1785-1853)
John A. Hargreaves

Chapter Eleven 189
‘Society has condemned you—unheard, I grant you: nevertheless, society has condemned you’: The Marginalisation and Criminalisation of the Poor in *The Mysteries of London* by G. M. Reynolds
Stephen Basdeo

Bibliography 205

Contributors 225

Index 229

PREFACE

This collection of essays grew out of the Borders and Margins Colloquium held at Leeds Trinity University College, West Yorkshire, in April 2010. This was the fourth in a series of joint colloquia, hosted alternately by the Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies and CICC (Civilisations et identités culturelles comparées des societiés européennes et occidentales), at the University of Cergy-Pontoise, Paris.

This book might be placed alongside a number of academic collections and monographs. *Repositioning Victorian Sciences: Shifting Centres in Nineteenth-century Scientific Thinking,* ed. David Clifford et al shows that the same considerations of shifting margins is also of concern to historians of science. *At the Margins of Victorian Britain: Politics, Immorality and Britishness in the Nineteenth Century* by Dennis Grube might be considered to have a similar approach; its focus is on political history, and explores shifting marginalisation in treatments of the other in this period. *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal* Space by Teresa Gomez Reus and Terry Gifford has a similar spread of topics but is focused solely on women. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Literature*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge University Press 2010) covers, as might be expected, a range of approaches as an introduction, and might complement this book.

Where *Borders and Margins* differs is in its focus on cross-fertilisation in the arts, on very specific exploration of liminal spaces (e.g. doors and windows), and on representation of marginal figures in writing (e.g. Methodist preachers). This collection of essays, moreover, contributes to a growing area of scholarship which explores Anglo-French interactions and exchanges. In choosing the term liminality the editors are aware of its nuanced implications, allowing suggestions both of the initial and the transitional. The writers are academics from the fields of literature, history and art history. There is thus something inherently liminal about the authorship of this book, and the cross-fertilisation of disciplines is as much engaged with as the actual doorways, art-forms or liminal figures covered in the essays themselves. The essays cover art history, literature, cultural history, the arts, faith. The three sections of the book group chapters according to key aspects of liminality suggested by the topics focused on by the contributors.

In Part I: Literary Liminality, the chapters focus on the *fin de siècle* and ways of negotiating its anxieties in terms of an engagement with the temporal, the temporary, and the artificial. The chosen writers operate in the period of decadent aesthetics and political and spiritual uncertainties, and each in different ways focuses on art itself, in terms of narrative and of the appearance of what is described. Thus, Amina Alyal considers narrative strategies employed by Arthur Machen in *The Great God Pan*, and how they relate to his subject-matter, that of a liminal other world and its seepage into this one. Machen seems to be negotiating the place of spirit in a material, scientific cultural context, much as Robert Louis Stevenson negotiated similar anxieties in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The impact of Darwin's *Descent of Man* is as key as decadent literary aesthetics to the amalgam he serves up. Peggy Blin-Cordon examines ways in which generic fusion informs Hardy's novels *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Jude the Obscure*, again considering *fin de siècle* Gothic and sensation fiction tropes in the context of realist developments in fiction at the end of the nineteenth century. in discovering an insistent overlay of the hyper-real with the Gothic or sensation mode. As a result of this Hardy is set in the context of Oscar Wilde's aesthetics of ugliness and Joseph Conrad's famous cry, 'The Horror! The Horror!'–ugliness exposes reality, as beauty neutralises it. Hannah Hunt also considers Hardy, excavating the text of *Far From the Madding Crowd* to find faces and bodies seemingly built and painted in unmistakeably architectural and art terms, so that identity and selfhood intersect with social constructs, and marginalised figure in the novel reflecting Hardy's own position as both central and marginal. Similarly the placing of figures before mirrors or inside/outside doors, gates and windows, materialise their inchoate anxieties and desires in ways that place emphasis on edifices and artefacts. Paul Hardwick explores William Morris's lifelong interest in medievalism, and in a little-known tale, *The Story of the Unknown Church*, the ghostly figure of a stone-mason on a medieval church provokes reflection on art and nature, crystalized in carved blossoms and foliage. An Anglo-Saxon elegy is examined for its simultaneous dwelling on built magnificence and its evocation of the ruins of time; the poem itself, 'damaged,' holds this paradox of decay and longevity, just as the ruins of a medieval church also do. Thus, in the topics of Part I, art and fantasy alike offer ways out of the *fin de siècle* and its preoccupations with endings and with unstable selves. Self and identity is also a thread in the next section.

Thus, in Part II: Envisioning Liminality, the chapters cover hierarchical perceptions of humanity, whether that be in terms of race, class, or gender.

Often, unsurprisingly in this Darwinian age, the categories are crystalized by comparison with animals, and the most provocative effects are produced when categories are juxtaposed or mutually transformative. Nathan Uglow charts the rise of the bildungsroman as peculiarly expressive of the optimism of the mid-Victorian drive to improve the self, society and the natural world, especially with female characters such as Jane Eyre. T. H. Huxley's elevated response to Darwinism is seen as being countered by the 'mad scientist' trope of later novels, when the solidity of the bildungsroman gives way to a prolific range of writers producing new shorter works in a multiplicity of genres, aimed at a new generation of office workers, with less time and energy to reflect. Rosemary Mitchell considers the 'domestic aesthetic' of G.B. O'Neill's paintings, particularly through an analysis of doorways in the paintings, which offer sub-narratives that supplement and even alter the narrative of the main frame. In this way an initial aspect offers on closer inspection a counterpoint of uncertainty and violence, accessing stages of a picture's narrative by exploring the movement between public and private, and war and domesticity—examining a range of female or youthful inhabitants and their male visitors. Karen Sayer explores definitions of the farm animal, and of the effects of rural contexts and urban commentary upon them, on Victorian views of animals, and their overlap with human beings – especially in terms of categorisation such as gender and class. A cartoon of the peasant and his close relation to the pig, for example, offers interesting reflections on developments of understanding of human-animal connections and separations; further, the equation of the female with nature and the rural suggests an opposition to masculine urban technology. Di Drummond explores the ways in which language and perception differentiate between members of the same race according to their association with rebellion against empire, and how this is complicated by intersections with abolitionist principles. She examines spatial and racial tropes that uncover imperialist attitudes and agendas in her examination of discourse about railway construction in India and Africa, considering racist hierarchies partly derived from Darwinian theory. Collectively, the chapters in this section present Victorian hierarchies of race, gender, and class intersecting in ways that depend closely on their representative media, whether these are genres of fiction, realist paintings, cartoons or legislative and political documents. In these ways, this section is political in its outlook and findings.

Politics, in Section III: Radical Margins, is at the forefront of the writers' interests. In all three chapters poverty, and those who fight its insidious (mis)representation by establishment tropes, is found to be the cause taken up by champions campaigning in diverse modes, whether it be journalism, preaching, or fiction. Odile Boucher-Rivalain, in her examination of Harriet Martineau, journalist and campaigner for social justice, discovers an emerging sense of outrage at the invisibility of the large proportion of Victorian women engaged in domestic service – and the accompanying conclusion that women who earn their own living are a reality despite contemporary cultural assumptions. Unpopular though her reforming ideas were (she thought women should be taught accountancy, for example), she nonetheless, Boucher-Rivalain argues, had an impact on issues of social justice even reaching beyond that of gender and class. John Hargreaves looks back to Chartism at the start of the period, discussing borders of the establishment as evidenced in the work of the radical Methodist preacher and revolutionary Benjamin Rushton, marginalised because of his poverty, his dialect, and his occupation as a handloom weaver at the inception of industrialisation. Addressing crowds, chairing meetings and preaching sermons, Rushton was an inspiring leader who fought against oppressive legislation in ways that had some impact at the time, and are some indication of the influence of Methodism on working class politics generally. Stephen Basdeo finds that G. M. Reynolds, contextualised in the Victorian crime fiction genre the penny blood, sees society as to blame for criminal behaviour in its institutionalised criminalisation of the poor. Reynolds exposes the grim scandals of prison conditions, hulks taking over from goals such as Newgate in their record of inhumanity. In speaking in the (somewhat engaging) voice of the criminal anti-hero, Reynolds is able to make a powerful case for the ineffectiveness of prison sentences to decrease crime. This section as a whole addresses the intersections of popular media for the dissemination of radical reforming ideas.

Altogether, this collection evokes a sense of temporal shift, in that changes in values and focus are uncovered as the century progresses. Some have an ekphrastic quality, showing how pictures can have a narrative, and how pictures as well as texts can be encoded with moral and social interpretations. Close scrutiny is applied to different kinds of texts, fiction and non-fiction, and the purposes for which they were produced. We hope the book will appeal to scholars and academics interested in a wide range of cross-categorisational transactions in nineteenth-century Britain. It is intended to be of interest to scholars of Victorian culture, and English nineteenth-century literature and art, particularly in terms of genre, as well as to academics interested in the development of social, personal, and national identities.

This volume would not have been possible without the input and support of all those who have contributed, who attended the original colloquium, and who provided inspiration and support in many ways, both at Leeds Trinity University and the University of Cergy-Pontoise. Out of those special thanks are due to Martin Hewitt, who was instrumental in originally setting up the colloquia; Joyce Simpson, for her initiative and vision in so many ways, in the Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies as well as specifically in this series of colloquia; and Jane de Gay, whose expertise, purpose and energy has meant so much to this and other aspects of Victorian Studies at Leeds Trinity. And our heartfelt gratitude, for hours of proof-reading, copy-editing, camaraderie and advice, ensuring that this project came together in its final stages, is due above all to Hannah Hunt.

PART I:

LITERARY LIMINALITY

CHAPTER ONE

PRESENT ABSENCE IN *THE GREAT GOD PAN*

AMINA ALYAL

On (not) seeing Pan

Arthur Machen's horror novel *The Great God Pan* (1890) is constructed as a series of interlocking narratives and narrative modes.[1] The complex structure works to reveal the central mystery, and to expose the effects of leakage or contamination between a number of different polarised conceptual categories. There are explicit borders in this novel, between the supernatural and ordinary daily life; between the destitute and the affluent; between the criminal and the lawful; between private shame and public reputation; between secret interest in the occult and public affirmation of the empirical; between Soho and Mayfair; between female and male. Horror seems to result when these borders are breached, most technically and initially by a doctor's surgical knife, "a slight lesion in the grey matter."[2] All of these borderlines contribute to the story, as it unfolds, and all negotiate some key preoccupations of the fin de siècle - but this chapter will focus in the main on the supernatural, and on the ways in which the narrative structure aids the process of revelation and concealment that is instrumental to the construction of horror in the novel, so that disclosure is modified, delayed, and, ultimately, denied in full.

The Great God Pan provoked strong response at the time of publication, both of revulsion and admiration, and was widely imitated and influential.[3] In the novel, a scientist, Dr Raymond, carries out brain surgery that results in the infiltration of the spirit of Pan into a teenage woman named Mary, as a result of which she conceives a daughter who causes dismay to the point of suicide amongst the men of London's upper middle class and aristocracy. Raymond's surgery is witnessed by a Mr Clarke, who carries out secret researches into "Memoirs to Prove the Existence of the Devil" but outwardly maintains his persona of "a dry … man of business."[4] Later on, a Mr Villiers investigates the crimes of a certain Helen Vaughan, who also goes by the names Mrs Herbert, Mrs Beaumont, and Miss Raymond, with the help of his friends Mr Austin, and Clarke. The novel thus tells us, or allows us to overhear, the story of this Helen Vaughan, a quasi-supernatural being of some destructive force but very elusive of capture (capture by text or in person). This outline contains all of the late Victorian elements of an interest in the supernatural (represented by Machen's membership of the occult order the Golden Dawn), in medical science (and the accompanying figure of the autonomous doctor who operates outside institutional checks and boundaries), in the animal/sexual nature of evolved humanity (brought into focus by fears of devolution implicit in Darwin's thesis), and the Incarnation, here inverted into a type of the antichrist narrative trope.[5] The ways in which these topics are constructed as fearful and furtive reflects fears of the time, indeed, but also demonstrate skilled narrative techniques.

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[1] Arthur Machen, 'The Great God Pan', in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[2] Machen, 'The Great God Pan', 183.

[3] Mark Valentine, *Arthur Machen.* Seren, 1995, 30-34; Alesha Claveria, "The Great God Pan/Brown: Shared Origins and Theme of A Victorian Horror Classic and Eugene O'Neill's Masked Play," *Eugene O'Neill Review*, Volume 36, Number 2 (2015), 212-225, at 214.

Much has been done in developing narrative theory; a good outline is given, for example, by Jonathan Culler.[6] My particular focus will be on the recursive, *mise en abysme* approach to narrative structure. To explore these structures, I will be focussing on what Seymour Chatman calls "a *what* and a *way*," explaining that "[t]he what of narrative I call its 'story'; the way I call its 'discourse.'"[7] As he goes on to elaborate, according to structuralism, the story, or *histoire*, "is the *what* in the narrative that is depicted" and discourse, or *discours*, is "the *how*."[8] Thus

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[4] Machen, 'The Great God Pan', 208.

[5] Cf the doctors for example in *Dracula*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Island of Dr Moreau*, and the earlier *Frankenstein* (1818). Four out of the eight characters engaged in forensic acts of telling in this novel are doctors.

[6] Jonathan Culler, "Story and Discourse in the analysis of narrative," in *Narrative Theory: Major Issues in Narrative Theory*, ed Mieke Bal (London: Routledge 2004), 117-18.

[7] Seymour Chatman, *Discourse and Story: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Cornell University Press, 1978), 9.

[8] Chatman, *Discourse and Story*, 19. See also Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2001), 4-7.

> [a] narrative is a communication; hence, it presupposes two parties, a sender and a receiver. Each party entails three different personages. On the sending end are the real author, the implied author, and the narrator (if any); on the receiving end, the real audience (listener, reader, viewer), the implied audience, and the narratee.[9]

To this might be added the Derridean “trace”: Derrida sees the act of writing as being a process that obscures as it reveals the thing described, “as if,” says Judith Butler,

> the past could appear without being occulted or eclipsed by the very means by which is signifies. The double movement of occultation (or erasure) and retroactive constitution is called “the trace”. … if the trace is the means through which what is prior is marked, then it is at once lost and found in the course of that marking. In this sense the trace is the origin of the origin … We could not really refer to an origin without operating within the terms of the aftermath and without subscribing to a sequential form of ordering that is effectively undone by the means by which it is articulated. … [Language] is a displacement, even erasure … the notion of the ‘trace’ is manufactured and occulted from a belated position within language. … Derrida’s trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.[10]

So if the only evidence of an event is in the text recounting it, then that text is, counter-intuitively, the origin of the event. For Derrida the next step is to efface entirely an origin independent of the text itself; but without going so far, the notion of presence and absence can be applied to narrative. In *The Great God Pan* we can posit the notion of an absent *histoire* (or character) presented (in both sense of the word) by a *discours* that in some ways works to occlude or occult the subject it raises. This approach implies a focus on the *telling* of a story, not so much the *showing* of it; in Chatman’s words,

> [a] process statement may be said either to *recount* or to *enact* an event according to whether or not it is explicitly presented, that is, uttered as such by a narrator. … The difference [is] between … *diegesis* and *mimesis*

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[9] Chatman, *Discourse and Story*, 28.

[10] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with an introduction by Judith Butler (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974 (2016)), x, xviii, xxxvi.

> (in Plato’s sense of the word), or, in modern terms, between *telling* and *showing*. Dialogue, of course, is the preeminent enactment.[11]

“Show not tell” is the mantra of creative writing, as if showing is always so much better than telling—and Arthur Machen does employ dialogue, and other modes of *showing*, but in such a way that the *showing* is set up against an equally insistent focus on *telling*. In this way he makes something superbly expressive out of the art of telling, in all possible manifestations of it, and in so doing, as I shall demonstrate, makes the *discours* actually enact the *histoire*. The *histoire* and the *discours* occupy two different time-streams. At the beginning of the novel the two are simultaneous: the surgery on Mary’s brain, i.e. Helen’s conception, happens at the same time as the characters perceive it or enact it. The *discours* then leaps forward some twenty-five years, but is concerned with a *histoire* of some years earlier. The *discours* then progresses slowly through a series of mere weeks, all the while dipping into a *histoire* of years ago that comes closer and closer in time to the narrative present, until finally, with the suicides and then the death of Helen Vaughan, the two time streams are again brought into conjunction. In the intervening years Helen Vaughan has moved geographically too, from Wales (and her inception from an interloping Roman god) to Florence to London to Buenos Ayres, and back to London. The effect is of something threatening and submerged rising inexorably to the surface, but not properly perceived by the characters until the climax—when Helen emerges as the frightful devil-woman who has caused the damnation and death of the cream of male London society, and when as a result she is herself condemned to death by representatives of those men.

The novel opens with a third-person limited narrative, in which some central points are made, in the form of the narrator quoting Dr Raymond’s words to Clarke:

> You see me standing here beside you, and hear my voice; but I tell you that all these things—yes, from that star that has just shone out in the sky to the solid ground beneath our feet—I say that all these are but dreams and shadows; the shadows that hide the real world from our eyes. There is a real world, but it is beyond this glamour and this vision, beyond these 'chases in Arras, dreams in a career,' beyond them all as beyond a veil. I do not know whether any human being has ever lifted that veil; but I do know, Clarke, that you and I shall see it lifted this very night from before another's eyes. You may think this all strange nonsense; it may be strange,

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[11] Chatman, *Discourse and Story*, 32.

> but it is true, and the ancients knew what lifting the veil means. They called it seeing the god Pan.[12]

Two worlds are postulated here, the mundane world which Raymond sees as “dreams and shadows” and the other, the “real world”, which is nevertheless concealed “beyond a veil”—a principle which has its roots in Plato’s theory of Forms.[13] Raymond sees this world as merely a “glamour” (as in the folkloric sense), but nonetheless he suggests here that the so much more “real” world is anything but solid to our perceptions, since it is concealed behind a veil. In order to convey this apprehension of something at once more solid and more inchoate than the world we live in, Machen employs various narrative techniques (or techniques of *discours*) that operate much like the veils Raymond suggests he is cutting away with the incision into the cluster of cells in Mary’s brain. In doing so Machen constructs an elaborate narrative that simultaneously covers and reveals a mounting horror that depends for its effects on the reader’s relationship to the narrative devices as they develop the story.

This relationship begins here in Chapter 1. In the ensuing dialogue, Clarke’s point of view is the one adopted most directly for the reader. His hesitant remonstrances and avowed fascination with the topic are the framework for Dr Raymond’s exposition of his philosophy. Raymond suggests the presence of a “waste void that bounds our thought”, the limits of knowledge, as it might be glimpsed by “an electrician of today” (the first of several explicit links of science and the occult in this chapter). This interest in the boundaries of understanding is not unusual in this period, appearing in novels such as *Flatland* (1884) and with the number of inventions current at this time, and in the scientific experiments of novels such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1986) and *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1996). The connection between science and the spiritual or even theological is made in novels such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Beetle* (1897). Raymond also mentions “the unutterable, the unthinkable gulf that yawns profound between the two worlds, the world of matter and the world of spirit.” He claims that “with a touch, I say, I can set free the current, with a touch I can complete the communication between this world of sense and—we shall be able to finish that sentence later on.” His “touch” is that of his surgical blade, and the operation is to release “a certain group of nerve cells in the brain” which has hitherto served an unknown purpose: it is “land to let, a mere waste place for fanciful theories”.[14] Here we have our first encounter with the way human minds cannot take full contemplation of Pan (after the operation Mary “is a hopeless idiot”), a trope of divine glory with wide application.[15] But here also is our first accompanying doubt about whether or not there is such a thing as an occult other world such as Raymond asserts and Clarke secretly hopes and fears: this might be brain surgery gone wrong, rather than an encounter with a god/demon. This doubt is an expression of the contemporary scepticism that requires Clarke to keep his researches into the Devil a secret. After this episode, though, he seems less equivocally to doubt, to such an extent indeed that he is scared off continuing. Thus, although Clarke is drawn to his occult studies, he is at the same time ashamed of his credulity and is so successful at his public image of the secular sceptic that Villiers later goes to him for precisely this quality of logic and clarity.[16]

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[12] Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, 184.

[13] Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Desmond Lee, edited by Melissa Lane. London: Penguin, 2007, section 7.7, 240-248. Also noted by Luckhurst in *Arthur Machen*, 279.

In this chapter an opposition is set up, between a mundane world and a spiritual world of which the mundane is unaware, and perhaps dismissive. The narrative devices and techniques mirror this particular borderland, for example that of active concealment. Although Raymond states unequivocally “Mary will see the god Pan!”, yet there is also that unfinished statement, that “we shall be able to finish that sentence later on”, suggesting something inarticulable about that “waste void”, the “empty deep”, the “unknown shore”, in the apophatic tradition, as demonstrated for example in the metaphysical poetry of George Herbert (whose line “chases in Arras, dreams in a career” Dr Raymond quotes). The unfinished statement is reinforced immediately by a further breaking off of information, this time from the reader:

> “But you remember what you wrote to me? I thought it would be requisite that she —”

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[14] Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, 185.

[15] Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, 189. And see for example Moses not looking at the face of God (Exodus 33.19); Christ transfigured and God concealing himself in a cloud (most explicitly in Matthew 17:1-8); Semele burned up at seeing Zeus’s glory (*Encyclopaedia Britannica,* accessed January 27, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Semele); Machen’s own work on the Holy Grail (Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, pp. 85-96); Marco Pasi, “Arthur Machen’s Panic Fears: Western Esotericism and the Irruption of Negative Epistemology,” *Aries* 7 (2007), 63-83, 75-78. I am grateful to Dr Hannah Hunt for suggestions here and in other parts of this paper.

[16] Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, 189, 203, 208.

> He whispered the rest into the doctor’s ear.[17]

This makes the reader work at the answer, attempt to probe and discover: “that she—” what, exactly? Has it to do with sexuality? With witchcraft? With a sacrament of some kind? Why is it so fearful or shameful or criminal a thing that Clarke cannot say it aloud? But we are left to speculate. We expect to find out—we do not find out. This discursive mode of signposted concealment—so that we are emphatically told we are not being told something—is employed to increasing effect. Often, the characters hesitate to tell all, or do not know how to express something.

This technique is matched with uses of flashback, flash forward, and with the employment of multiple narrators and narrative vehicles, all of which combine to bring out the ways in which horror (or Panic) is developed as the reader progresses into the pages of the book. In this chapter Clarke remembers an evening of some years in the past, and some unspecified sylvan experience, one of the descriptions of nature that connect with Pan in this novel and also with other mysterious experiences Machen creates elsewhere, for example in *The Hill of Dreams*.[18] So the story takes place in the present it describes—we see it directly, as it unfolds. But there is also the first of the interpolations of another time and place, in the form this time of Clarke’s waking reverie, which introduces Pan subliminally into the medical operating theatre:

> Strangely that wonderful hot day of 185—rose up again in Clarke's imagination; the sense of dazzling all-pervading sunlight seemed to blot out the shadows and the lights of the laboratory, and he felt again the heated air beating in gusts about his face, saw the shimmer rising from the turf, and heard the myriad murmur of the summer.[19]

This memory, which “strangely” (and yet aptly) he thinks of at the moment of the invitation of Pan into Mary’s brain, is of a walk he took fifteen years before—the events in Raymond’s study take place in the late 1860s. The rest of the novel is set in the late 1880s to early 1890s. In other ways, too, this first chapter is removed from what follows, in narrative mode as well as it time and place. This is partly because it was designed as a short story—but what follows makes a virtue of this necessity.[20] The rest of the novel takes place some twenty-five years later, in London, in a relatively short space of time and place, but with reference to a range of other times and places. The remit in terms of place in the surface narrative can be walked in a matter of minutes, although the walk would take you from one social scene to another radically different, if not opposite: Soho to Mayfair. It can also, apparently, take you from the 1890s to contact with a being from 2000 years ago. Chapter 2 sets the narrative mode up: it begins as before, in limited third-person narrative, from Clarke's point of view, inset with his own written account of a story told to him by Dr Phillips, relatively recently. Here is the first distant glimpse of Helen—through Clarke reading the account he himself wrote, of Phillips's story, in which Phillips himself was not directly involved, so the inference is that Phillips heard it from someone else. Helen, therefore, appears to us through four "veils", four mediations of her story, through four narrators: the account of her by the person who told her story to Philips, Phillips's account to Clarke, the account Clarke wrote down of what Phillips said, and the omniscient narrator now telling us about Clarke re-reading his account (to the reader, in effect), a short while later. The narrative layering here in Chapter 2 is complex and typical; significantly, Villiers will twice suggest a "nest of Chinese boxes", referring to his own detection of the mystery.[21]

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[17] Machen, “The Great God Pan”, 185. And see for example “Prayer I” in George Herbert, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by C. A. Patrides. London: Dent, 1974, 70.

[18] Arthur Machen, *The Hill of Dreams*. Tartarus Press, 1998.

[19] Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, 186.

[20] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 25; Claveria, ‘The Great God Pan/Brown’, 213.

The effect is one of distancing, and of inspiring fear by suggestion. Joseph Crawford, in *Gothic Fiction and the Invention of Terrorism*, notes that it is not so much the topics as the modes of writing that create "terror" in a work of fiction; it "provided the methodology for writing about a subject—any subject—in such a way as to make it seem fearful and threatening."[22] Crawford suggests the genre arose out of the "British experience" of the French Revolution, which they "experienced … *at a distance* … not through the direct experience of battle or invasion, but in various mediated forms, through stories, letters, newspapers, fictions, and so on."[23] He examines contemporary conspiracy theories as reworkings of older theories of demonic conspiracies.[24] Crawford is concerned with the use of tropes rather than narrative structures, but the principle holds in the case of Machen's narrative techniques.

The third-person, arguably omniscient, narrator re-emerges throughout, but is effaced at times by unmediated dialogue (*showing*, but also paradoxically *telling*) or by one of the many other narrative modes employed: a book of sketches, a single sketch, an isolated name written down, letters, a newspaper report, an eye-witness account. The result is a mix of immediacy, presence in the moment, and retrieval of the past or reports from far away. The characters, centred in Villiers's Holmesian exercises, are engaged in detecting a mystery; we are too. The use of dialogue is one of the elements (the documents are another) which emphasize the ways in which understanding is shaped by the story-teller and the receiver of it—not by things actually happening, or about direct presence. So Chapter 3 *shows* Herbert and Villiers are walking and talking, with almost no narrator input, but in fact Herbert *tells* his story to Villiers in the form of dialogue; then Villiers and Austin are *shown* seated at their club, but in fact Austin *tells* another aspect of Herbert's story. The same structure occurs in part of Chapter 4, where we are *shown* Villiers visiting Clarke, but in fact he *tells* Clarke more about the Herbert story. Chapter 5 *shows* Austin and Villiers 'pacing sedately along Piccadilly one pleasant morning in May', but in fact Villiers *tells* Austin about Clarke, and then shows him a letter which further *tells* Villiers (and therefore Austin and us, the readers) about Clarke's undisclosed knowledge of some dark secret (we can make our own connections with the surgery in Chapter 1, of which both men are ignorant).[25] The two then are *shown* going to Austin's rooms, where they look at the book of Meyrick's sketches sent to Austin by a doctor friend of Meyrick's. This book *tells* another narrative, of a "frightful Walpurgis Night of evil, strange monstrous evil, that the dead artist had set forth in hard black and white."[26] This is another interpolated *telling*. Thus we are rarely in the position of directly witnessing events and actions, but instead see the characters discussing what has happened. So the *histoire* (the characters seated or walking together) is almost always in fact a *discours* (a form of narration of past events) and it is a *discours* that is really about another *histoire* (the story of Mary, Dr Raymond, Pan and the genesis of Helen Vaughan) of which the characters are mostly unaware, and of which we too only know fragments, albeit different fragments. The recursive devices (dialogue, letters, books, newspapers) make the *histoire* recede further from the hope of immediate apprehension.

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[21] Machen, 'The Great God Pan', 199, 202.

[22] Joseph Crawford, *Gothic Fiction and the Invention of Terrorism: The Politics and Aesthetics of Fear in the Age of the Reign of Terror* (Bloomsbury, 2014), vii.

[23] Crawford, *Gothic Fiction*, x.

[24] E.g. Crawford, *Gothic Fiction*, xi, 95.

The Classical distinction between showing (*mimesis*) and telling (*diegesis*) does imply that drama is supremely mimetic, as there is no narrator.[27] But even in *Oedipus Rex*, Aristotle's prime example of a tragedy, all the events of the *histoire* happen off-stage, and the play, however mimetic it might seem to be, is supremely discursive. Machen's dialogue too is always about action intended or already done, not about what is happening at that moment—for example, the operation on Mary is discussed, before and after, but narrated by the third-person narrator. Villiers' sighting of Mrs Beaumont is in a conversation about it, afterwards. Her death is in a conversation about it, beforehand, and is described afterwards in Dr Matheson's statement, and Clarke's letter to Raymond, not by the narrator. Helen Vaughan is insistently present in the various narrative modes, but at the same time the very modes of telling are a process that always only chart her absence, so that she is occulted by the telling, obscured in a way that recalls the "veil" of Dr Raymond's speculations in chapter 1.

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[25] Machen, 'The Great God Pan', 207.

[26] Machen, 'The Great God Pan', 212.

The reader is therefore put in the position of an eavesdropper, a direct witness of conversations and sometimes inner thoughts, of letters and other documents perused by the characters immediately in front of us, and of attitudes to Helen. It is forcefully apparent that all the characters after Chapter 1 we encounter are men. Of the three female characters, Mary appears directly before us only in the relatively simple narrative mode of Chapter 1; and Helen and Rachel appear in the aforesaid complex layering of Clarke's "Memoirs". Helen thereafter only appears in the accounts and reports of a series of men. She never enters the narrative directly. Even the one instance of quoted speech reaches us through three veils (Austin tells Villiers what Argentine told him Helen said):

> Argentine asked her how old the wine was, and what do you think she said? "About a thousand years, I believe."[28]

She is not the only thing that is thus kept at a distance. At a number of points, starting with that interrupting whisper in Chapter 1, we are thwarted on the verge of finding something out: Clarke shuts his book in Chapter 2, mid-sentence, once more making a point of telling us we are not being told the whole thing:

> … Rachel told her a wild story. She said—
>
> Clarke closed the book with a snap, and turned his chair towards the fire.

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[27] E.g., Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated and edited by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), Chapter 6 (17-20), Plato, *Republic*, Book 7.

[28] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 211.

And the omniscient narrator augments this impression by telling us that when Clarke first heard the story he interrupted Phillips with a cry of horror:

> When his friend sat one evening in that very chair, and told his story, Clarke had interrupted him at a point a little subsequent to this, had cut short his words in a paroxysm of horror. "My God!" he had exclaimed, "think, think what you are saying. It is too incredible, too monstrous; such things can never be in this quiet world, where men and women live and die, and struggle, and conquer, or maybe fail, and fall down under sorrow, and grieve and suffer strange fortunes for many a year; but not this, Phillips, not such things as this. There must be some explanation, some way out of the terror. Why, man, if such a case were possible, our earth would be a nightmare."[29]

The reader is left roused up to a pitch of curiosity, and then denied the conclusion. The story continually operates in this way: Austin throws down the confessional manuscript without reading it; Clarke refuses to explain his moment of faintness; the manuscript relating Helen's death is "illegible" at a crucial point and the writer explicitly states that he will not describe the "Form" he saw; and even at the end, when Raymond writes to Clarke, "You know now what frightened the boy in the wood" we are not so sure that we do know, and we suspect Clarke may know more than we do, because all along we have been made aware of information Clarke is privy to that we are being excluded from. We can only guess. We have a powerful presentiment of evil, power, temptation; we have clues—the inversion of the Nicene Creed ("ET DIABOLUS INCARNATE EST. ET HOMO FACTUS EST"), "Walpurgisnight", "pans and aegipans", and of course "the great god Pan", as well as the reaction of those who come too close to Helen, and cannot live—"I knew I had looked into the eyes of a lost soul"—and the suicide epidemic:

> Lord Swanleigh was found one morning in his dressing-room, hanging from a peg affixed to the wall, and Mr. Collier-Stuart and Mr. Herries had chosen to die as Lord Argentine. There was no explanation in either case; a few bald facts; a living man in the evening, and a body with a black swollen face in the morning. … There was a horror in the air, and men looked at one another's faces when they met, each wondering whether the other was to be the victim of the fifth nameless tragedy.[30]

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[29] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 195.
[30] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 229, 232, 195, 220, 215.

But as to the precise nature of this hidden horror, we can only conjecture, and are in the position of piecing together scattered clues—there is no big reveal, no final scene of revelation. We are left in unsatisfied—we have some understanding of the truth, but not all of it, and so our conclusions have to be made in doubt, have to remain hypothetical. This has something to do with the nature of what is being concealed/revealed.

Machen's attempt at a Holmes and Watson configuration (Villiers and Austin) employs Sherlockian methods such as befriending fringe society and deducing from evidence, and is a trope in his other novels.[31] But the revelation at the heart of it all is not crime in the ordinary sense, but closer to sin. Revelation is a word one cannot use in connection with this novel without its necessarily biblical overtones.

Darwin, Pan and Lucifer

What is clear enough is that Pan is evoked as a Classical figure with Christian demonic associations; the mention of "Walpurgis Night" and "Fauns and Satyrs and Aegipans" in the same paragraph are enough to make this point.[32] But he is also associated with sylvan reverie and recreation, as in Clarke's waking dream in Chapter 1, or Helen's walks and frolics in Chapter 2. And further, there are biological and scientific elements, as in the doctor's surgery, and in the bodily description of Helen's death. Machen's evocation of Pan is not an isolated case, as can be seen from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's plangent paeon to Christ, "Pan is Dead", or Aleister Crowley's triumphalist "Hymn to Pan" (paralleled by his "Hymn to Lucifer").[33] As Clive Bloom explains:

> Pan represented to many late Victorians and Edwardians a dream of social escape and personal release, expressed sometimes as a return to magical thinking and sometimes as a rush towards sexual excess and free love. Pan stood for unalloyed youth and rural bacchanal sometimes embraced by the "golden youth" of the pre-war period, as exemplified by Rupert Brooke

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[31] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 46.

[32] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 212.

[33] Aleister Crowley, 'Poems', PoemHunter.com, accessed January 22, 2018, https://www.poemhunter.com. A useful overview of contemporary writing on Pan can be found in Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 1995, 32; and in Roger Luckhurst, *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, 278; and Pasi, "Arthur Machen's Panic Fears," 69. For the Classical treatment of Pan, see Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (eds), *The Classical Tradition* (The Belknapp Press of the Harvard University Press, 2010), 682-83.

> and his poetry. Yet it had its darker side, a side that was essentially chaotic, degenerate and occult, as suggested in Arthur Machen's novel…

But Bloom adds to this "dream of social escape and personal release" the existential quandary of the evolutionary paradigm:

> Where was one to turn, caught between the nightmare of Darwinism, the end of mankind, the inevitable indifference of geological time and the spiritual vacuum that seemed to be sucking back the dead? Something else was needed to bring hope.
>
> Another writer would hold part of the answer. In 1891 Kenneth Grahame had already spent 12 years a loyal member of the Bank of England … but his pin-striped dreams lay elsewhere in the artistic bohemia of *The Yellow Book* and the river banks of the Thames. On 25 April 1891 he published a short story in *The National Observer*. It was called *The Rural Pan*, about the gods of the river bank forced to hide from modernity, but ever-present to those who were willing to look beyond mere materialism and the world of city bankers. In 1908 the episode was incorporated into *Wind in the Willows*.[34]

Grahame's Pan is of the same essential type as the Indian gods in Kipling's "The Bridge Builders" (1898).[35] The contemplation of displaced nature gods expresses a "dream" that is, as Bloom argues, closely related to "the nightmare of Darwinism." N. Rebry adds to the mix medical advances in neurosurgery and the effects of shock; and Gabriel Lovatt explores surgery and epidemic as metaphors for decadence.[36] In Machen's novel, Pan at once recalls rural idyll, demonic threat, and Darwinian evolution—or, more importantly, devolution.

The Descent of Man (1879) contains the possibility of devolution in the pun of its title.[37] As Stephan Karschay argues, "Darwin's theory can be read as accommodating the spectre of its own inversion."[38] He discusses the term "atavism" as an evolutionary one which for Darwin meant an individual lapse into an earlier stage, an idea taken up by criminal anthropology at the time:

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[34] C. Bloom, *Victoria's Madmen: Revolution and Alienation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 99. See also Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Harvard University Press, 1969), esp. 76-133.

[35] Rudyard Kipling, 'The Bridge Builders' (1898) in *The Writings in Prose and Verse of Rudyard Kipling, Vol. 2: The Day's Work (Classic Reprint)* (Forgotten Books, 2018).

[36] N. Rebry, " 'A slight lesion in the grey matter': The gothic brain in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*," *Horror Studies*, 7: 1, (2016), 9—24; and Gabriel Lovatt, "From Experiment to Epidemic: Embodiment in the Decadent Modernism of Arthur Machen's 'The Great God Pan' and 'The Inmost Light'," " *Mosaic*, Vol.49, No.1 (March 2016), 19-35.

[37] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (1879), edited by James Moore and Adrian Desmond (London: Penguin, 2004).

> Criminals and sexual deviants were categorised as animalistic throwbacks to an earlier evolutionary stage, as aberrant individuals who are closer in development to children and savages than to healthy adults.[39]

Karschay cites the publication in 1880 of *Degeneration: a Chapter in Darwinism*, by Edwin Ray Lancaster, which draws from Darwin the logical conclusions that a) degeneration might be possible and b) perhaps humans are still not fully evolved.[40] The instability and doubt these conclusions raise are brought out in a number of Gothic/horror novels of the late nineteenth-century, for example in *The Island of Dr Moreau*, *The Beetle*, and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and can be seen in the graphic death scene of Helen Vaughan/Mrs Beaumont/Mrs Herbert/Miss Raymond (her shifts between names have in a sense prepared us for her spillage between forms here), as described in a Dr Matheson's papers:

> "… The skin, and the flesh, and the muscles, and the bones, and the firm structure of the human body that I had thought to be unchangeable, and permanent as adamant, began to melt and dissolve. … For here there was some internal force, of which I knew nothing, that caused dissolution and change.
>
> "Here too was all the work by which man had been made repeated before my eyes. 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. The principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed.
>
> "… and at last I saw nothing but a substance as jelly. Then the ladder was ascended again... [here the MS. is illegible] ...for one instance I saw a Form, shaped in dimness before me, which I will not farther describe. But the symbol of this form may be seen in ancient sculptures, and in paintings which survived beneath the lava, too foul to be spoken of ... as a horrible and unspeakable shape, neither man nor beast, was changed into human form, there came finally death.[41]

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[38] Stephan Karschay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siecle* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 30.

[39] Karschay, *Degeneration,* 38.

[40] Karschay, *Degeneration,* 41-42.

[41] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 228.