

# The Racialization of the Occult in Nineteenth Century British Literature



# The Racialization of the Occult in Nineteenth Century British Literature:

*Dark Magic from 1850-1900*

By

John Bliss

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# INTRODUCTION

In the wake of global imperial enterprise, markers of a painful history are left behind. Plaques, statues, monuments, and buildings give silent witness to the nationalistic possession of colonized lands and the attacks on human rights enacted in the name of one group's heritage in favor of another. In discussions regarding the preservation of these colonial markers, a tension emerges between the often violent, racist past they commemorate and the lessons they can teach to recognize and dismantle the systems that installed them so that such atrocities can be avoided in the future. Literature is a significant part of this colonial heritage. Literary texts reflect, respond to, influence, and preserve the ideas, opinions, and prejudices from the times in which they were written. They process and transmit social, political, economic, and scientific discourses to the reading public with a unique directness, clarity, and impact. As literature becomes popular and its reach expands, that impact becomes more significant. Analyzing the literature of colonial empires, such as Victorian Britain, provides insight to the origins, meanings, and contributing factors of a shameful and destructive legacy. More importantly, literary research offers an opportunity to deconstruct ideas and representations that were ultimately unsubstantiated or ignoble but linger, and the findings can support discussions and actions for transforming both the present and the future.

My analysis reveals some of the ways that the literature of Victorian Britain participated in this imperial enterprise through the representation of ideas that were part of scientific, social, and political discourse throughout the nineteenth century. This book focuses on the representation of the practitioner of the occult in mid to late nineteenth century British literature. In addition to expanding its empire globally, Victorian Britain was undergoing major social and economic change, contending with the effects of the Industrial Revolution, the rise of the middle class, an influx of immigrants from colonized lands, and the instability of religious conviction in the face of scientific and philosophical developments. New scientific theories, investigations, and discoveries abounded during the Victorian era. As the scope of scientific inquiry expanded, emergent ideas about and portrayals of scientific research were introduced into British society, including who was qualified to pursue scientific research, what were legitimate areas and methods of study, and

conversely, which people and topics were excluded from scientific endeavors. The nature of the occult was central to many of these debates. Beyond its status as a popular interest, the occult was a source of emotional support and scientific curiosity during this time of change and uncertainty because it seemed to offer answers to both spiritual and scientific questions through measurable if unconventional means. However, the occult was also viewed as a threat to British society, an assault on its values, and a fundamental danger to emerging scientific enterprise. I chose to focus on the occult in part because of the ubiquitous yet precarious position it held within Victorian British society.

The practice, study, and performance of the occult were incredibly popular throughout Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Séances were so popular that one woman desiring to host a gathering complained to the *Yorkshire Factory Times* in 1889 that “it seemed almost an impossibility to obtain a hall for a meeting or secure a club-room,” and noted that “if the spirit of the departed Brontës are floating unseen around the homes of the people, it would not be unwise of those devotees to the mysteries of séance and raps to implore these guiding stars to infuse a broader spirit of charity into the hearts of some of the local dignitaries.”<sup>1</sup> In 1888, *The Radical Leader* reported that the practice of the occult was so profitable that a fortune teller had recently “died worth £24,000.”<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey K. Nelson’s 1969 study of *Spiritualism and Society* notes that even Queen Victoria hosted a séance at Buckingham Palace in 1846.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars have provided in-depth analysis as to why the occult rose to such cultural prominence during this time. Pamela Thurschwell credits the anxieties associated with maintaining a worldwide empire and advances in technology that allowed information to spread rapidly; Marlene Tromp adds that popularity of the occult was in response to the increase in scientific discoveries that challenged previously unshakeable dogma on the origins of Earth and mankind, particularly the proposed existence of invisible substances and forces; and Andrew McCann notes that the occult provided a quasi-spiritual framework that offered material answers to questions about the afterlife when Christianity could not.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The Difficulty of Securing a Club-Room,” *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 11 October 1889, 15.

<sup>2</sup> “The Confidence Trick,” *The Radical Leader*, 4 August 1888, 5. This is equivalent to £2,105,146.20 in 2019.

<sup>3</sup> G.K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge, 2014; originally 1969), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Marlene Tromp, *Altered States:*

The study of the occult's rise is categorized under what Christopher Partridge has defined as "Occulture": "the social processes by which ideas related to the spiritual, esoteric, paranormal, and conspiratorial become influential in society, central to which is popular culture, which disseminates and remixes occultural ideas."<sup>5</sup> Since popular culture is the widest disseminator of occultural ideas, it becomes the medium through which the public comes to understand and encounter the occult, such as in the reference to the Brontës in the public complaint against séances above. Christine Ferguson has added that the occult was "by no means the exclusive reserve of Romantic all-male secret societies or of the urban bourgeoisie who formed the core membership of subsequent occult organizations [but was] available to the wider public" through advertisements, public lectures, word of mouth, "and, perhaps most of all, in the pages of popular novels, which, as the century progressed, became increasingly suffused with occult plots and tropes."<sup>6</sup> One such trope that appears in a wide range of popular novels is the non-white origin of the occult and its practitioners. Turbaned fortune-tellers, dark-eyed mesmerists, and mysterious alchemical masters from distant lands populate the landscape of occult fiction, threatening or assisting the white British heroes as the story demands. These fictional representations inspired real-world counterparts, as occult societies claimed Eastern origins and influences to enhance their mystical credibility. Fin-de-siècle conjurers adopted exotic costumes and stage names to create what Christopher Goto-Jones terms "a magical effect...a sense of altered reality created by the magician's performance that creates the impression that the normal rules of reality do not apply to their sphere of influence."<sup>7</sup> These figures in turn inspired the depiction of occult practitioners in fiction.

Given the intermingled relationship between British society's conception of the occult and literature that synthesized and represented it to readers, this book examines the ways in which the occult and its practitioners are represented in British novels from 1850-1900 and asserts

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*Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006); Andrew McCann, *Popular Literature, Authorship and the Occult in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Partridge, "Occulture is Ordinary," in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kenneth Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 116.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Ferguson, "Occult Sciences," in *The Routledge Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Science*, eds. John Holmes and Sharon Ruston (London: Routledge, 2014), 423.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Goto-Jones, *Conjuring Asia: Magic, Orientalism, and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 42.

that their representations are racialized in each case. Specifically, this book analyzes how the practice of the occult is portrayed in *Cranford* by Elizabeth Gaskell (1854), *A Strange Story* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1861), *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins (1868), *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886), *Trilby* by George Du Maurier (1894), *The Blood of the Vampire* by Florence Marryat (1897), *The Beetle* by Richard Marsh (1897), and *Cleo the Magnificent* by Louis Zangwill (1899). These novels are emblematic of the ways that British novels commented on, participated in, and contributed to, the racialization of the occult that occurred throughout the nineteenth century in Britain. To demonstrate how pervasive this trend was, a range of canonical and non-canonical texts across several genres that participate in the racialization of the occult are incorporated and organized by the type of occult practice being racialized. This racialization is accomplished through an emphasis on five key elements regarding occult characters in the novel: physical darkness, a comparison to dangerous animals, a threat posed to the white characters, the framing of the occult character as representative of their entire race, and the eventual removal of the occult character from the story. The novels examined here contain these elements with minor variations. Non-white characters who are secretly white, such as Signor Brunoni (or Samuel Brown) in *Cranford*, and Cleo the Magnificent (or Selina Kettering) in the novel of the same name, are not compared to dangerous animals, but their non-white personas still fulfill the other requirements.<sup>8</sup> Margrave's degeneration in *A Strange Story* is not characterized as representative of all white people but is framed as an inherent aspect of his lower class.<sup>9</sup> These conclusions are drawn from close analysis of the texts themselves as well as from a wide variety of primary sources from the time when each novel was written to provide a historical context to them.

As the example stories demonstrate, racialized constructions continue throughout the century even as the rhetoric of their origin changes. In other words, each of the selected novels racializes the occult, but the underlying tenets of the occult's relationship to race change according to the evolving theories of racial science prevalent at the time of publication. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, race was purported to result from environmental factors. The country you were born in, the cultural practices you engaged in, and the food you ate were all believed to have significant impact on your race. This was how some early thinkers came to distinguish white children born in the West Indies as "creoles," racially separate from

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<sup>8</sup> These are discussed in chapter four.

<sup>9</sup> This is discussed in chapter three.

their England-born parents. As Carolyn Allen notes, this designation indicated a closer equivalent between white children born in the West Indies and the people of color brought there as slaves because the word creole was used for both of these groups as well as those of “mixed blood,” all of whom were united in their difference from Europeans.<sup>10</sup> As the century progressed, these distinctions shifted, and race was no longer an environmental product but a set of innate heritable characteristics. The shape of your head was now considered to be a product of your parents’ genetics rather than due to the ambient temperature. Beliefs and literary representations of the occult follow this same shift, transforming from a cultural practice with direct effects on the body and mind to an inherent propensity and quality that could be used to identify one’s race.

The selection and analysis of novels from multiple authors publishing in different genres throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century demonstrates that this shift is not the product of generic coincidence. It extends beyond conventions of genre or individual style. By analyzing historical evidence and the contexts from which these novels emerged, we are able to assess whether the portrayals of the racialized occult reiterated, complicated, or dismissed the prevailing narratives about race present during their respective dates of publication.

While I have selected a variety of texts and authors to examine, I invite readers to consider other texts that might be placed in conversation with those I include but have set aside for a variety of reasons. The focus that this book places on the period from 1850-1900 reflects the clearest consistent racialization of the occult and its practitioners. Earlier texts also feature racialized portrayals of occult practitioners but are removed from the cultural discourses in which the other novels I have selected participate. For example, *St. Leon* by William Godwin (1799) features Francesco Zampieri, a mysterious alchemist who imparts the secrets of immortality to the novel’s protagonist. Zampieri is represented in a manner similar to Haroun of Aleppo in Bulwer-Lytton’s *A Strange Story*. Godwin’s novel, however, is more strongly influenced by the politics of the early 1800s, as evidenced by its thematic and narrative similarity to other works published at the time, such as *Bethlem Gabor* by J.D. Burk (1807) and *St. Irvyne* by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1811).<sup>11</sup> *Zanoni* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1842) is

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<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Allen, “Creole Then and Now: The Problem of Definition,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 44.1 (1998), 36-7.

<sup>11</sup> For further discussion of these ideas, see A.M.D. Hughes, “Shelley’s *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*,” *The Modern Language Review* 7.1 (1912): 54-63; Wallace Austin Flanders, “Godwin and Gothicism,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 8.4

also excluded despite its focus on the occult practices of two ritualistic Chaldeans, Zanoni and Mejnour. I chose to exclude this novel because the form of ritual magic represented in the text was not a popular topic of discussion either in literature or in British society at large. Notably, Bulwer-Lytton later rose to prominence in occult literary discourse among Theosophists such as H.P. Blavatsky and ceremonial occultists who came to populate secret societies such as the Golden Dawn including W.B. Yeats, A.E. Waite, and Aleister Crowley.<sup>12</sup> I do not directly engage with these works, nor any others after 1900, because while there is much to be explored in relation to how white occultists continued to grapple with racialized occult practice, the anxieties and cultural discourse in Britain in the lead-up to World War I are distinct from those in the mid-nineteenth century. Other novels within the selected time period have likewise been omitted. For example, *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot (1876) participates in a similar racialization of the occult through the loosely explained powers of Mordecai Ezra Cohen who utilizes what Royce Mahawatte terms “Kabbalistic Jew-dar” to identify the spiritual potential in the titular protagonist and by extension his hidden Jewish ancestry. While Mordecai’s mystical abilities stand in stark contrast to the novel’s representation of English Jews who choose not to openly practice Judaism and are thus presented as spiritually deficient have fascinating implications for the environmental theories of race discussed in this book, these powers cannot be easily defined as a specific occult practice.<sup>13</sup> Others texts reiterate and compound the messages contained in novels that were published earlier and are included herein. Many of Arthur Conan Doyle’s works were omitted from this book for this reason, including *The Mystery of Cloomber* (1888) that portrays a threateningly mesmeric trio of Indians seeking revenge against a British aggressor, *The Parasite* (1894) that features a West Indian female mesmerist who drains the vitality of her male English victim, and *The Ring*

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(1967): 533-45; and Ellen Levy, “The Philosophical Gothic of *St. Leon*,” *Caliban* 33.1 (1996): 51-62.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Bulwer-Lytton’s place within these societies, see Wouter Hanegraaff, “Western Esotericism and the Orient in the First Theosophical Society,” in *Theosophy Across Boundaries*, eds. Hans Martin Kramer and Julian Strube, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), 29-64; Ingvild Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson, “Theosophy and Popular Fiction,” in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein, (Boston: Brill, 2013), 453-73; and James Machin, “Towards a Golden Dawn,” *The Victorian* 1.1 (2013): 2-13.

<sup>13</sup> Royce Mahawatte, “Daniel Deronda’s Jewish Panic,” in *Queering the Gothic*, eds. William Hughes and Adam Smith, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 63.

of *Thoth* (1890) that depicts an alchemist able to extend his life through alchemical secrets from the East. Other works were too massive to effectively compare, such as the five-part Dr. Nikola series by Guy Boothby (1895-1901) that illustrates a wide array of occult practitioners that contributed to the “yellow peril” of the fin-de-siecle.<sup>14</sup> All of the excluded novels identified in this section are supplemental to and supportive of my hypothesis, but I have centered on those texts that provide the clearest and most foundational material.

In the process of my analysis of the selected texts, I use several terms throughout this book that I will clarify here, specifically the occult, racialization, and non-white. As Partridge notes “the occult” is an expansive term that encompasses the “spiritual, esoteric, paranormal, and conspiratorial,” categories that are themselves unwieldy and extensive.<sup>15</sup> In the interest of providing a more concrete foundation for my argument, my use of “the occult” throughout this book refers to the engagement in a practice that produces or seems to produce a supernatural outcome. While this engagement is often deliberate, it can also be unintentional, such as Harriet Brandt’s inherent mesmeric vampirism.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the supernatural outcome produced may be either the intended goal of the practice or it may be an unintended consequence, such as the alchemical degeneration experienced by both Dr. Jekyll and Margrave.<sup>17</sup> Finally, as the chapter on conjurors elaborates, this definition of the occult includes those who claim to be and are perceived as supernatural through their racialized practice, as these characters elicit responses from the white characters in their respective narratives similar to those of the authentically supernatural figures in other novels.<sup>18</sup> This definition is intended to separate my work from the various bodies of scholarship devoted to examining systems of forbidden knowledge, such as Roger Shattuck’s *Forbidden Knowledge* (1997), or analyzing supernatural beings, such as in the collection of essays edited by Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane, *Popular Revenants* (2012).<sup>19</sup> I am more interested in the

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<sup>14</sup> For more on Boothby see Ailise Bulfin, “Guy Boothby and the Yellow Peril,” *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies* 20.1 (2015): 24-40; and Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Partridge, “Occulture,” 116.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>17</sup> Both of these outcomes are discussed in chapter three.

<sup>18</sup> This is elaborated in chapter four.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1997); *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and Its*

human characters who wield or tap into unseen powers than the creatures they summon or create through the application of those powers.

As Karim Murji and John Solomos have indicated, the term “racialization” generally refers to the process of “defining ethnic or group boundaries on the basis of race, understood as colour or biological difference” by ascribing racial identities onto a practice or belief.<sup>20</sup> The novels I analyze assign characteristics specifically associated with non-white races to those who practice the occult. Furthermore, they portray the occult as originating from non-white characters and as an inherent quality in non-white races. As Victorian perceptions of and discourse about these racial groups evolved, the portrayal of the racialized occult also changed. For example, in the 1850s and 1860s, when race was thought to be a product of one’s physical, cultural, and intellectual environment, the novels I examine implicitly or explicitly warn that practicing the occult can result in a fundamental shift in racial temperament, meaning that white practitioners of the occult could internalize the non-white racial characteristic associated with occult practice.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the century, when race was discussed as a series of inherent characteristics, the novels shift their message to warn of the inevitable threat that racialized practitioners of the occult pose to white society, whether the characters intend to or not.<sup>22</sup>

I use the term “non-white” throughout this book to refer to the diverse racial groups that were all designated as Other by white Victorians. While acknowledging that different cultures and peoples possess unique distinctions and that a white/non-white binary categorization inherently prioritizes whiteness, we also must contend with the fact that Victorian concepts of white supremacy benefitted from portraying all other races as monolithic and interchangeable, with only minor differentiation. Some racial scientists did assemble racial hierarchies but, as discussed in the next chapter, they disagreed on how those hierarchies should be ordered beyond the superiority they assigned to their own whiteness and the inferiority they

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*International Receptions 1800-2000*, eds. Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane (Rochester: Camden House, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Karim Murji and John Solomos, *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>21</sup> See Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (New York: Archon, 1982); and Douglas Lorimer, “Reconstructing Victorian Racial Discourse,” in *Black Victoriana*, ed. Gretchen Gerzina (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 187-207.

<sup>22</sup> See Douglas Lorimer, “Theoretical Racism in Late-Victorian Anthropology,” *Victorian Studies* 31.3 (1988): 405-30; and Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2010).



assigned to everyone else. This homogenization of non-white races was also present among white occultists, exemplified by psychic researcher D.W. Prentiss, who, in his 1882 article on hypnotism, described how:

the same influences which work the modern phenomena of hypnotism are undoubtedly identified with the manifestations of magic found described in ancient history. The magic of Zoroaster, the wonderful performances of the magi of the East—among the ancient Persians, Hindoos, and Egyptians—the methods of divination, the remarkable feats of the snake charmers of India and Egypt, all belong to the same category.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the vast differences between the civilizations and practices to which Prentiss refers, all are portrayed interchangeably. To many white Victorians, other races were essentially the same, united by their knowledge and practice of the occult. Thus, when I use the term “non-white,” it is to refer to the multivarious groups of people that were conceptualized as Other by wealthy white Victorians and not to endorse or replicate the system they employed. While the designation of the occult as a non-white practice allowed it to be applied to any racial group, the novels on which I focus specifically attribute the occult to characters from India, Arabia, the West Indies, and Egypt, as well as to Jews, whom Victorians considered a racial rather than a cultural group.<sup>24</sup> I also discuss the implicit framing of white members of the lower classes as a racial group distinct from the white upper classes in the fin de siècle.

## Historical Context

The racialization of the occult identified in these novels is partially the result of a larger cultural movement within Britain to define the professional ideals of empirical science. Debra Schleef demonstrates that the boundaries of professionalization favored the knowledge produced by white middle-class men.<sup>25</sup> Heather Ellis has shown that the ideals of white middle-class masculinity became rhetorically intertwined with those of a scientific education, which Kate Hill argues was solidified in the professional sphere throughout the century.<sup>26</sup> As efforts were being made to produce a close

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<sup>23</sup> D.W. Prentiss, “Hypnotism in Animals,” *The American Naturalist* 16.9 (1882): 715.

<sup>24</sup> I explore the racial position of Jews more thoroughly in chapter one.

<sup>25</sup> Debra Schleef, “Identity Transformation, Hegemonic Masculinity and Research on Professionalization,” *Sociology Compass* 4.2 (2010): 122–35

<sup>26</sup> Heather Ellis, “Knowledge, Character, and Professionalisation in Nineteenth-Century British Science,” *History of Education* 43.6 (2014): 777-92; Kate Hill,

relationship between white middle-class masculinity and science, Wouter Hanegraaff notes that the occult was designated as “the domain of *the Other*...imagined as a strange country, whose inhabitants think differently and live by different laws” than those who accept the type of Britishness extolled by scientifically-educated white men.<sup>27</sup> Some mid-century anthropologists included systems of belief in their categorization of the different races, arguing that superstitions caused verifiable physical variations that could be measured and classified, drawing from discussions of phrenology to justify their claims. As John van Wyhe has shown, early phrenological justifications “allowed Victorians to assert their hierarchical superiority through the language of scientific naturalism,” a superiority that “encompassed...physical, mental and religious qualities.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the ability to effectively practice the occult was considered to be inherent in non-white races, a belief that persisted in anthropological discussions of race even after phrenology lost popularity. Thus, the occult became closely associated with non-white races, positioned as separate from or even in opposition to white British citizens.

As Janet Oppenheim explained in 1985, during the Victorian era, “the lure of the occult...lay precisely in its antipathy to the strictly rational empirical outlook that was increasingly perceived as the hallmark of Victorian thought.”<sup>29</sup> As the hegemony of science became linked to Western culture and Christianity became spiritually compromised by concession to science, the East, “ever exotic, mysterious, alien, was an escape from and an alternative to the shallow, externally-oriented culture of the West.”<sup>30</sup> The emphasis placed on empirical science created a spiritual vacuum, one that the occult quickly filled, assisted by its purported exotic and romantic origins. Peter Lamont has argued that as public performances and personal accounts of the occult spread, the “failure of skeptical scientists to provide non-supernatural explanations of [occult] abilities revealed the profound limitations of their own putative objectivity and insistence of verifiability” that subsequently provided believers with a defense against empirical

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*Women and Museums, 1850-1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>28</sup> John van Wyhe, *Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 58.

<sup>29</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16.

<sup>30</sup> Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 162.

material criticism, albeit a fallacious one.<sup>31</sup> The exotic appeal of the mystic East revitalized spirituality, and the potential for scientific discovery drew the attention of well-known scientists and public figures, including John Elliotson, Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Queen Victoria. This popularity was further enhanced by the attention of high-profile skeptics who sought to dispel the aura of mystery around the occult, including scientists like T.H. Huxley and performers like John Nevil Maskelyne. Rather than existing as an easily dismissed practice of races that were portrayed as inferior, the occult grew to become a popular aspect of Victorian society.

The growing popularity of the occult did not result in a rejection of its racial components. Non-white races were positioned as the originators of the occult, both by believers who extolled the power of these races and by skeptics who derided them as superstitious and savage. The positioning of the occult as inherently non-white produced anxieties that non-white races were able to produce more powerful effects through the practice of the occult than white people were through science. As publisher Charles Bray noted in his 1866 study of telepathy:

important news travels faster in India by Mental Telegraph than by Electric Telegraph. The results of important battles have been known for days before the intelligence could arrive by the ordinary or official means. The source of these tidings cannot be traced; the natives say 'it is in the air.'<sup>32</sup>

In an 1898 presentation before the Society for Psychical Research, physician and researcher J. Shepley Part declared that in West Africa "the transmission of occult intelligence by occult means is treated by the better class of natives as everyday knowledge."<sup>33</sup> In these texts and public addresses, occult powers that outstripped Western technology were portrayed as the norm rather than the exception, and as accounts of occult powers assigned ever-more powerful abilities to non-white races, white British anxieties intensified. While these anxieties took many forms, they can be summarized by Arthur Conan Doyle's warning to his readers at the end of his 1888 novel *The Mystery of Cloomber*. Doyle asserts that if the skeptical European "will look to the East, from which all great movements

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Lamont, "Spiritualism and Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence," *The Historical Journal* 47.4 (2004): 917-8.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Bray, *On Force, its Mental and Moral Correlates* (London: Longmans, 1866), 84.

<sup>33</sup> J. Shepley Part, "A Few Notes on Occultism in West Africa," *Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research* 14.35 (1898): 344.

come, he will find there a school of philosophies and savants, who, working on different lines from his own, are many thousand years ahead of him in all the essentials of knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> In short, if non-white races possessed inherently occult characteristics, and the practice of the occult allowed for greater powers than the study of science, then non-white peoples posed a powerful threat to Britain and white British people. White people who sought to understand and study the occult, whether they were believers like Doyle or skeptics searching for a scientific explanation of occult phenomena, were thousands of years behind the peoples of the East, who were believed to have originated the practice.

The novels I have selected for analysis represent attempts by the authors to grapple with these anxieties, in concurrence with Michael Austin’s assertion that literature “allows us to access, store, and process the information provided to us by the world we live in...in order to resolve anxiety through the creation of narrative.”<sup>35</sup> The narratives contained in these novels reflect the anxieties that plagued their creators, and their resolutions represent proposed solutions or warnings of consequences. For example, one of the anxieties present in Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* revolves around the appropriate role of mesmerism, weighing the benefits of its psychological insight against the troubling matter of its origin among dangerous dark-skinned peoples. The novel allows Collins to examine the various aspects of the dilemma and propose a solution within a space that Austin designates as “useful without being necessarily true,” couching his proposition in the world of fiction while still attempting to impart lessons meant to reflect and shape the world outside of the novel.<sup>36</sup> This process of embodying anxiety in narrative has received close critical attention in relation to the portrayal of monsters, such as the analyses of Dracula contained in Franco Moretti’s 1983 essay “Dialectic of Fear,” or Stephen Arata’s 1996 book *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*.<sup>37</sup> However, as Jack Halberstam indicates in his 1995 book, *Skin Shows*, monsters operate as “meaning machines [producing] the technology of monstrosity...allowing audiences to process fears related to gendered,

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<sup>34</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Mystery of Cloomber* (London: Dover, 2010; originally 1888), 285.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Austin, *Useful Fictions: Evolution, Anxiety, and the Origins of Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), xvii.

<sup>36</sup> Austin, *Useful Fictions*, xvi.

<sup>37</sup> Franco Moretti, “Dialectic of Fear,” *Signs Taken for Wonders*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller (London: Verso, 1983) 83–108; Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

sexual, racial, and social differences onto which may be projected a negative identity.”<sup>38</sup> While the selected novels do not feature monsters per se, all of them engage in this process of rationalization through the racialization of the occult. Since this racialization occurs at the intersection between scientific and social discourse, racial narratives, and the portrayal of the occult in popular media, it is consistent with Christine Ferguson’s assertion that studying literature allows “for new mappings of the dynamic relationship between social culture, the popular novel, and science,” effectively uniting “high-brow and mass culture.”<sup>39</sup> Since the novels draw from so many points of inspiration, they offer unique insight into the ways in which these different fields of thought overlap.

## Foundation of Research and Other Reading

While this book is unique in its scope and focus, it is not alone in its examination of the relationship between the occult and Victorian society. Instead, this work emerges from an initial analysis of the existing scholarship and the discovery of a paucity of attention devoted to the role that race plays in this relationship. The research that has most heavily influenced my work can be divided into three broad categories: that which explores the impact of the occult on society generally; that which relates Victorian discussions of the occult to social issues existing at the time but did not explicitly address the ways in which race influenced these discussions; and that which directly discusses how race influenced the depiction of the occult. The first category is occupied primarily by histories, either general ones, such as Robert S. Cox’s 2003 book on American experience of the occult *Body and Soul* and Ronald Pearsall’s 2004 recounting of the occult in Britain *The Table-Rappers*, or those that focus on a specific occult practice, such as Alison Winter’s 1998 history *Mesmerized* or Roger Luckhurst’s 2002 text *The Invention of Telepathy*.<sup>40</sup> These histories offer insight into how the occult intersected with the

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<sup>38</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>39</sup> Christine Ferguson, *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-De-Siècle* (London: Routledge, 2006), 52.

<sup>40</sup> Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers: The Victorians and the Occult* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004); Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

material realities of Victorian life, demonstrating the popularity of the occult and indicating the wealth of primary resources available that offer direct commentary on how certain occult practices were performed and how those practices were received by believers and skeptics alike. Due to the broader scope of these histories, they are unable to pursue every facet of their occult subjects and, while they do discuss why the occult became popular or how it related to Victorian social issues, they cannot do so comprehensively.

Histories of race and the formations of racial categories, in seminal texts, such as Christine Bolt's 1971 *Victorian Attitudes to Race* and Douglas Lorimer's 1978 *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, or in more contemporary works, such as Catherine Hall's 2002 book *Civilising Subjects*, Edward Beasley's 2010 history *The Victorian Reinvention of Race*, and Satnam Virdee's 2014 text *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, are also integral to my understanding of race for this research. These texts did not, however, extend their scope to the ways in which discussions of the occult impacted or were impacted by the formations of racial categories that they discussed.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, those works that focus on the ways in which the occult was associated with other elements of Victorian life provide more nuanced analysis of how the occult shaped social discourse. For example, the collection of essays edited by Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn in 2012, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, offers critical insight into the ways that spiritualism and the occult were "not viewed as having been on the outskirts of society and culture, but rather as culturally central for many Victorians."<sup>42</sup> They, and the scholars with whom they collaborated, successfully argue that narratives surrounding Spiritualism and the occult presented "flexible allegories for many concepts that are distinctly modern" including the transmission of cultural ideals, the rise of rapidly evolving technology, and the permeability

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<sup>41</sup> Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race: New Racisms and the Problem of Groupings in the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

<sup>42</sup> Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 1.

between otherwise disparate groups.<sup>43</sup> However, while they are able to effectively articulate how Spiritualism grew as a social movement and united with other social and progressive movements of the era to provide a quasi-secular alternative to both overly materialistic science and demystified Victorian Christianity, they do not directly engage with the occult's association with race. The essays in this collection are primarily concerned with the occult as it was filtered through the specific practices surrounding Spiritualism. As Marina Warner has shown, Spiritualism, with its focus on the séance and the manifestations of spirits within a controlled space, was largely popular among white middle class "men and women [who] were well-to-do and well connected...philanthropic and liberal," whose interest fostered "a nursery of emancipatory change in education, politics, women's status, and the approach and enterprise of scientific knowledge itself."<sup>44</sup> The specific history and influence of Spiritualism are distinct from more generalized occult practices, and thus lie beyond the scope of my writing.<sup>45</sup> Essays in the collection that do address the occult separately from Spiritualism are more concerned with the spiritual formation of nominally occult beliefs that arose than with the connections that the expressions of those beliefs shared with contemporary racial rhetoric. For example, J. Jeffrey Franklin's "The Evolution of Occult Spirituality in Victorian England and the Representative Case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton" highlights the breadth of Bulwer-Lytton's study of occultism, but rather than exploring the similarities between his work and those of contemporary occultists or the place that race and class occupy within those works, it "theorizes a broad evolutionary model for the stages of occult spiritual discourse in England over the course of the century." Franklin's essay presents Bulwer-Lytton's works as a syncretic amalgamation of previous ideas that would later influence other hybridized forms of spirituality.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kontou and Willburn, *Ashgate Research*, 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 239.

<sup>45</sup> The work performed by Bridget Bennett and Molly McGarry in their respective texts is similarly limited. Bridget Bennet, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> J. Jeffrey Franklin, "The Evolution of Occult Spirituality in Victorian England and the representative Case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, eds. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 125-6. This essay is also expanded in Franklin's book *Spirit Matters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

Similarly, Alex Owen has produced in-depth analyses of the ways that Spiritualism and the occult engaged with the social paradigms of the Victorian era. In her 1989 work *The Darkened Room*, she demonstrates how feminized occult spaces like the séance room, the oracle's chamber, and the fortuneteller's parlor provided a social and spiritual structure that allowed for the advancement of women's empowerment and expression that was able to exist separately from masculinized pursuits like material science or business.<sup>47</sup> In her 2004 book *The Place of Enchantment*, she argues that the practice and study of the occult "not only addressed some of the central dilemmas of modernity but was itself constitutive or symptomatic of key elements of modern culture."<sup>48</sup> Just as this book concerns itself with the formation of the occult as closely associated with race, Owen's text deals with "the cultural formation of, and advances an argument about, the nature of 'the modern.'"<sup>49</sup> Much of Owen's methodology, grounded in textual reference and comparing the elitist structure of twentieth century "new" occultism to more democratic expressions in the Victorian period, presents a suitable framework for other research on how social issues are recontextualized within the formation of occult societies and writings, as this book will do. However, while Owen makes reference to the pseudo-Eastern influences that persisted in twentieth century occult societies like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, she assumes its association is readily apparent and does not delve into how that close association was forged throughout the previous century.

William Hughes' 2015 book on mesmerism, *That Devil's Trick*, provides a detailed pre-history to the work that I present. Drawing from a catalogue of popular periodicals, Hughes attempts to convey "the widely disseminated cultural archive of images, reputations and fears through which the reading public may have regarded the mesmeric fictions of its day."<sup>50</sup> However, Hughes is primarily focused on the early years of mesmerism in Britain, detailing responses to the practice that range from 1800 until the early 1850s. His analysis is an invaluable resource for gauging the popularity of mesmerism outside of the medical field, particularly in demonstrating the delight that satirical publications took in mocking professionals who were fired for their experimentation with the practice,

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<sup>47</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>48</sup> Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> William Hughes, *That Devil's Trick: Hypnotism and the Victorian Popular Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 4.



such as John Elliotson, but it neglects to pursue the relationship that mesmerism had with race. Esdaile's experiments in India are lightly touched upon, but their similarity to indigenous practice and the subsequent unease of the British medical community are unexplored.<sup>51</sup> This tumultuous and at times contradictory relationship between the power and sub-humanity of the occult and its practitioners is more thoroughly explored by Darryl Jones. In his 2009 article "Borderlands" Jones notes that fin-de-siècle gothic narratives imbricated Celtic claims of spiritual or occult power and the "monster-ization" of "the native Irish [into] terrifying beast-men...denizens of another world" that exists just alongside the logical world of Britain.<sup>52</sup> While Jones is focused on the representation of Celticism and its interplay with occultism, his understanding of the ways in which the portrayals of indigenous groups outside of Britain both subscribe to and are repulsed by narrative of the occult is similar to the work I undertake in this book.

Accounts of the place of race in the discussion of the occult that offer a more direct parallel to my own research include Patrick Brantlinger's writings on what he terms the Imperial Gothic. Older accounts of the occult's popularity often reflected James Webb's argument in his 1971 book *The Flight from Reason*, that "superstition [arises] in circumstances of anxiety and uncertainty," and that "during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century crisis of consciousness this sort of situation was the order of the day: and superstition flourished."<sup>53</sup> In other words, the occult's popularity was understandable, as it offered comfort in a time of seemingly chaotic change. However, Brantlinger's formulation of the Imperial Gothic goes a step further, directly linking the portrayal of the occult in Victorian novels to "the seemingly progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism [and] a seemingly antithetical interest in the occult."<sup>54</sup> Brantlinger argues that depictions of practitioners of the occult took on specific meaning during an era where anxieties about the state of Britain's empire flourished. Thus, fictional accounts of white characters battling against vengeful occult figures from the Orient "offer insistent images of decline and fall, or of 'civilization' turning into its opposite," and the triumph of the white characters over those racialized figures represented "a way of preventing England itself from 'relapsing into barbarism.'"<sup>55</sup> Rather than existing as an inevitable social

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<sup>51</sup> This is addressed in chapter one.

<sup>52</sup> Darryl Jones, "Borderlands: Spiritualism and the Occult in *Fin de Siècle* and Edwardian Welsh and Irish Horror," *Irish Studies Review* 17.1 (2009): 40.

<sup>53</sup> James Webb, *The Flight from Reason* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1971), xiii.

<sup>54</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, "Imperial Gothic," *ELT* 28.3 (1985): 243.

<sup>55</sup> Brantlinger, "Imperial Gothic," 246.

occurrence, the occult was stylized to represent ongoing anxieties about the fate of the empire that culminated at the fin de siècle. I build on Brantlinger's premise to argue that practitioners of the occult were represented in a specifically racialized manner, associating Britain's imperial anxieties with a particular type of non-white occult figure who in turn could act as a representative of Otherness that plagued Victorian thinkers. I also expand his argument to include the ambiguous position that the occult occupied. The complicated relationship that science and medicine had with mesmerism, for example, reveals a more nuanced position for the occult within Victorian society than one simply emblematic of regression and barbarity.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, white popular entertainers who disguised themselves as non-white conjurors for profit reveal the widespread popularity of the occult among British audiences, which similarly complicates the categorization of the occult as simply an expression of the inferior Other, even as the fiction I examine portrays these disguised conjurors as a threat.<sup>57</sup>

H.L. Malchow's 1996 text *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* offers a similar argument about the influence of race on the formation of Gothic imagery in Victorian novels.<sup>58</sup> Malchow demonstrates how popular portrayals of cannibalism, slave revolts, racially-inherent disease, and miscegenation in newspapers and religious periodicals influenced the descriptions of Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, and the Wandering Jew as supernatural representations of Victorian Others, alien and otherworldly outsiders that threaten the stability of white society. These representations were a culmination of the ways in which "the West has constructed non-European peoples as projections of its own anxieties and as rationalizations for and instruments in the extension of its economic and political power."<sup>59</sup> Malchow's limited scope allows for deeper exploration of similar themes. For example, while his brief examination of Harriet Brandt in Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* convincingly argues that her status as a "half-breed" positions her as a threateningly alien presence that looks like the white characters but is racially different from them, he does not connect this status to women of mixed race who represent a magnified threat of femininity and blackness within the colonial imagination.<sup>60</sup> Instead, he connects her to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which he demonstrates was similarly influenced by reports of violent Black slaves in

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<sup>56</sup> This relationship is explored more fully in chapter one.

<sup>57</sup> This is explored in chapter four.

<sup>58</sup> H.L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> Malchow, *Gothic Images*, 1.

<sup>60</sup> This is explored in chapter two.

West Indian newspapers. This connection serves his theory but consequently leaves much of Brandt's character unexamined. Similarly, Daniel Pick examines the associations that Du Maurier creates in *Trilby* between Svengali's Jewishness and his practice of the occult in his 2000 book *Svengali's Web*.<sup>61</sup> However, an examination of the occult is secondary to Pick's primary thesis, which analyzes film and stage portrayals of Svengali and the lasting impact that the character has had on modern culture. While the sections of Pick's book that summarize the cultural origins of Svengali overlap with my research to some degree, I am primarily concerned with how Svengali's Jewishness and his mesmerism are aligned within the novel and the anxieties that alignment reveals. Building on previous research by scholars such as Malchow and Pick allows this book to flesh out the relationship between race and the occult.

Christine Ferguson has also contributed important research to the study of the occult in Victorian culture. Her 2012 book *Determined Spirits* is particularly relevant as it charts the relationship that formed between discussions of race and Spiritualist practice in many of the same ways that I do about other occult practices. Ferguson argues that Spiritualism "incorporated traditional and emergent paradigms of biological determinism, hereditary fatalism and racial destiny" and had a heritable racial component that could be identified by external racial factors.<sup>62</sup> Ferguson also argues that Spiritualism operated as a "controversial form of popular utopianism whose followers maintained that natural selection alone was not a sufficient mechanism for bringing the human race to its optimal stage," supporting her argument that while Spiritualists championed social equality, their beliefs mirrored eugenic utopianism and "worked to naturalise rather than dissolve the oppression of minorities."<sup>63</sup> However, Ferguson's focus on Spiritualism produces different conclusions than I reach in my research. These differences primarily emerge because Ferguson's research is centered on mediumship, an enterprise that she notes was primarily performed and governed by white people who argued that their powers were not the products of "revelation, piety or rigorous practice, but rather of evolutionary destiny and inherited capacity,"<sup>64</sup> which necessarily relies on concepts of racial essentialism, biological determinism, and biofatalism. For example,

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>62</sup> Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity, and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ferguson, *Determined Spirits*, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Ferguson, *Determined Spirits*, 14.

she asserts that attacks from the medical community questioning the sanity of Spiritualist leaders resulted in narratives of spiritual authority by virtue of mental inferiority.<sup>65</sup> This narrative was extended as a justification of the supposedly inherent spiritual power wielded by non-white races, as the mental deficiencies that white anthropologists and racial scientists assigned to non-white races were used as evidence that they were more attuned to the spiritual world rather than the physical one. These findings parallel the anxieties I have found regarding the knowledge of the occult supposedly present among non-white races. However, outside of the context of Spiritualism, the framing of this inherent ability differs significantly. As I demonstrate, the occult power wielded by non-white races was primarily feared rather than celebrated, and its potential usefulness was outweighed by the threat it represented. Ferguson's analysis of Spiritualist arguments in favor of interracial mixing also radically differs from the anxieties surrounding miscegenation that I have found to be prevalent in the literature and scientific discourse of the nineteenth century. By closely examining the similarities between Spiritualism and eugenic utopianism, Ferguson's study exposes a gap between the proclaimed social ideal of the Spiritualist movement and reality but does not fully contend with the racial ideas presented outside of Spiritualism.

Most contemporary scholars focus their research within the confines of Spiritualism and only briefly discuss its relationship with race. This gap does not exist without reason. The occult occupied a liminal space within British society, accessible across class lines, and became closely associated with occasionally conflicting social movements that championed changes to perceptions of race, gender, imperialism, and social order. This ambiguous position is exemplified in an 1889 letter from eugenicist Francis Galton to Frederick Myers, the founder of the Society for Psychical Research, in which Galton expressed his frustration at being unable to easily study the amorphous occult. He drew a large X to illustrate his frustration that the knowledge they sought as psychical researchers was in "a position just at the meeting point of three or four different specialties and consequently it is hard to find persons whose previous pursuits would make them justly critical."<sup>66</sup> In 1898, anthropologist Andrew Lang confirmed that the process of deciphering precisely how the occult was viewed in Britain was complicated by the fact that it was "unusual for European travellers and missionaries to give anecdotes which might seem to 'confirm the delusion

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<sup>65</sup> Ferguson, *Determined Spirits*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> Francis Galton, Letter to Frederick Myers, 11 February 1889, Myers Papers, Wren Library, Trinity College, 2/63.

of benighted savages.”<sup>67</sup> The occult was associated with “delusion” and “savagery” to such a degree that white British people hesitated to openly endorse it. This hesitation to embrace the label of the occult for fear of being associated with practices considered “savage” both reinforced the association between savagery and the occult and obfuscated how practices that would otherwise be considered occult may have been incorporated into Britain outside of Spiritualism. Thus, the full scope of the occult’s relationship with race and British society is complex, not easily defined, and extends beyond the confines of any one work.

## Scope of Research

In developing my argument for the racialization of the occult in Victorian Britain, I have taken a historical and evidentiary approach, meaning that I have drawn evidence from a wide variety of primary sources from the time when each novel was written to support analysis of the texts of the novels and provide a historical context to them. Additionally, I referenced secondary sources of other scholars whose conclusions were consistent with mine. To access these sources, I have made use of the Gale Collection of Nineteenth Century Newspapers, the Hertfordshire County Record Office, the Dolph Briscoe Center, the British Library, Dr. Williams’ Library, the National Library of Scotland, the Special Collections Libraries at the University of St Andrews, University College London, and the University of Edinburgh. The archives at each of these institutions provided an invaluable resource of newspapers and periodicals from across the political spectrum, ranging from local or privately-owned weekly publications to nationally syndicated periodicals, including those produced in other countries and distributed across the British Empire. The findings presented in the official proceedings of scientific societies, primarily distributed to official members, offer insight into the scientific and cultural discussions of the day. These findings were also published in journals and magazines intended for a broader public audience, in satirical articles or cartoons in magazines such as *Punch*, in light-hearted commentaries in entertaining periodicals such as *The Boy’s Comic Journal*, or in thoughtful descriptions in leisure magazines intended for the middle class such as *The Edinburgh Gentleman’s Journal*. Bernard Lightman has shown that many of the articles concerning scientific discourse in popular periodicals were written by the same people publishing their findings in scientific journals “in an attempt to create a wider base of educated readership whose interest in science was vitally important to its

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (London: Longmans 1898), 79.

survival.”<sup>68</sup> Professional journals also provided an international perspective, as medical journals in Britain, France, and the United States were often in conversation with one another, debating the same ideas and reprinting whole articles.

While I have narrowed my focus to discuss the perceptions of the occult in Britain specifically, the topics addressed by the novelists I examine, such as mesmerism, were being discussed on a global scale. I place publications that dealt with scientific theories in conversation with publications by occult societies that were meant for internal debates or broader distribution. The official proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research resemble the discursive and referential format of publications distributed by other scientific organizations, such as the Ethnological Society, for example, but they addressed the same subject matter as *Light*, the magazine published by the Theosophy movement for disseminating their spiritual ideas. These sources in turn directly or indirectly engage with the ideas put forward by Christian periodicals, which reported on missionary work abroad, commented on spiritual topics within Britain, and reprinted sermons delivered from the pulpit. In addition to the available periodical resources, I reference evidence in authoritative and formal sources such as reports to Parliament, published manuscripts, travelogues, official biographies, treatises, and reprinted lectures as well as more personal, informal accounts such as diary entries, memoirs, and letters in order to develop a multifaceted argument about the different ways that race and the occult were being discussed in public and in private. Despite the variety of sources I investigated, I do not claim that I have exhausted all the evidence. Rather, it indicates that this is a rich field of inquiry inviting further research.

Readers with a critical background will notice that I have selected texts that have garnered a range of critical attention. Some, such as Gaskell’s *Cranford* and Collins’ *The Moonstone*, have a significant body of scholarship devoted to them, while others, such as Zangwill’s *Cleo the Magnificent*, have comparatively little. I have selected these canonical and non-canonical novels in order to investigate a diverse range of writers and ideas to provide a multifaceted picture of the complicated cultural landscape from which they emerged. In my analysis of the novels, I have been able to draw clear parallels among the racial, scientific, and occult discourse in the Victorian era and the portrayals in the texts. As I elaborate in the Chapter Outline below, I have addressed texts from the middle of the century along with

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<sup>68</sup> Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 423.