

**William Hope Hodgson's borderlands:
monstrosity, other worlds, and the future
at the *fin de siècle***

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Edinburgh Napier University, for the award of Doctor of
Philosophy

May 2009

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Acknowledgements

I sincerely wish to thank Dr Linda Dryden, a constant source of encouragement, knowledge and expertise, for her belief and guidance and for luring me into postgraduate research in the first place. I am, likewise, deeply grateful to Dr Sara-Patricia Wasson for her invaluable knowledge, advice, insights, enthusiasm, and appreciation.

Completion of my PhD was made possible by a studentship from the Faculty of Engineering, Computing, and Creative Industries for 2008. Anne Sibbald has been unremittingly supportive of my personal and professional development over the past few years, of which I am greatly appreciative.

It has been a pleasure sharing an office with Gracia, Kate, Melanie, Rona, Stephanie, Rennie, and Julia of 'Room 204'; thank you for calming and encouraging me with good company, shared experiences, and coffee. I also thank Professors Alistair McCleery, Laurence Davies, and Ian Campbell for the benefit of their advice and experience.

My thanks to the Graduate School, and to Dr Alison Crerar, Professors Jessie Kennedy and Chris Atton, and the others of the FECCI postgraduate support team for providing invaluable learning opportunities, and promoting community among the Faculty research students. Grants from the School of Creative Industries have enabled me to attend conferences in France, Stirling, and Leicester.

My thanks to NULIS, especially Marian Kirton and Robin Thomson for advice and for locating obscure Hodgson materials on inter-library loan. I am also appreciative of the resources provided by the scholarly community of VICTORIA, the National Library of Scotland, and the library of the University of Edinburgh.

Finally, I am very grateful to my family, George, Beth, Katy, Lucy, and Rod, for their continual faith, love, care, and encouragement.

Abstract

William Hope Hodgson has generally been understood as the author of several atmospheric sea-horror stories and two powerful but flawed horror science fiction novels. There has been no substantial study analysing the historical and cultural context of his fiction or its place in the Gothic, horror, and science fiction literary traditions. Through analysing the theme of borderlands, this thesis contextualises Hodgson's novels and short stories within these traditions and within late Victorian cultural discourse. Liminal other world realms, boundaries of corporeal monstrosity, and the imagined future of the world form key elements of Hodgson's fiction, reflecting the currents of anxiety and optimism characterising *fin-de-siècle* British society.

Hodgson's early career as a sailor and his interest in body-building and physical culture colour his fiction. *Fin-de-siècle* discourses of evolution, entropy, spiritualism, psychical research, and the occult also influence his ideas. In *The House on the Borderland* (1908) and *The Night Land* (1912), the known world brushes against other forms of reality, exposing humanity to incomprehensible horrors. In *The Ghost Pirates* (1909), the sea forms a liminal region on the borderland of materiality and immateriality in which other world encounters can take place. In *The Night Land* and *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* (1907), evolution gives rise to strange monstrous forms existing on the borderlines of species and identity. In Hodgson's science fiction—*The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land*—the future of the earth forms a temporal borderland of human existence shaped by *fin-de-siècle* fears of entropy and the heat-death of the sun. Alongside the work of other writers such as H. G. Wells and Arthur Machen, Hodgson's four novels respond to the borderland discourses of the *fin de siècle*, better enabling us to understand the Gothic literature of the period as well as Hodgson's position as a writer who offers a unique imaginative perspective on his contemporary culture.

Introduction

In almost every sense of the phrase, William Hope Hodgson is a writer of borderlands. His life straddled the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth. His fiction crosses boundaries of genre and convention, and its subject matter returns compulsively to the Gothic borderlands of realities, bodies, and imagination; it is with these borderlands that this thesis is primarily concerned. Hodgson's novels and his best known short stories are written in fantastic modes: the Gothic tradition, the characteristic supernatural and horror of the *fin de siècle*, and the emerging genre of science fiction. As a young man Hodgson was a sailor and much of his fiction is characterised by a marine setting combined with monstrous horrors produced by unknown reaches of the oceans. His novels and stories are further shaped, like other contemporaneous texts, by the cultural conditions of the *fin de siècle*: its science, sociology, and politics. Hodgson's four novels—*The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* (1907), *The House on the Borderland* (1908), *The Ghost Pirates* (1909), and *The Night Land* (1912)—are acknowledged for their imaginative power and have earned him a place as the 'first great exponent of cosmic horror' and 'one of the masters of the modern horror story' (Stableford 'Early Modern Horror Fiction 100; Neilson 'The Night Land' 1105).

Due to his compelling visions of horror and his emergence in the early years of the twentieth century, Hodgson occupies an important position in the development of the literary traditions of horror and science fiction as these diversified from the modern Gothic of the *fin de siècle*. Hodgson's visions of universal end, the terrors of the sea, and the degeneration of the human body have resonated through modern culture and influenced numerous subsequent texts. The astral journeys of *The House on the Borderland*, for example, foreshadow those of Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937) (see

also note 82). Hodgson's monstrous cosmic horror echoes through H. P. Lovecraft's stories, such as 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928); the skeletal pirates of Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003) draw on *The Ghost Pirates*; and the 'abhumans' of the Games Workshop wargame Warhammer 40000 derive from *The Night Land*.

Despite this, Hodgson has never been the subject of a dedicated critical study, and this thesis will focus on analysis of his fiction. It does not trace Hodgson's impact on twentieth-century horror, which is beyond the scope of what is attempted here and constitutes further work. Before that can be done, however, the work of this thesis provides an important basis for understanding and analysing Hodgson's fiction, contextualising him within the *fin de siècle* and engaging with the traditions out of which his fictions arise.

Reasons for the neglect of Hodgson's work include his early death in the First World War, the failure of his novels to reach a wide readership (partly because he chose not to serialise them before book publication), and problems encountered by readers and commentators over Hodgson's stylistic decisions, usually characterised as 'archaic' and 'sentimental', for example by H. P. Lovecraft. *The Night Land* in particular attracts these latter accusations; this problematic and extraordinary book has coloured critical generalisations about the rest of Hodgson's work, as well as about his talents, capabilities, and personal values. It is in part the work of this thesis to suggest a re-evaluation of Hodgson as a writer and to examine his four novels as forming a consistent attempt to explore the borderlands of human experience.

In recent decades the value of Hodgson's work has been more widely recognised, helped perhaps by a modern willingness to overlook his stylistic 'flaws' and a recognition that the power of his visions of horror has endured over the past hundred years and continues to seize the imagination of modern readers. Since the 1970s an increasing interest in early Gothic horror and supernatural fiction has led to regular

reprints of Hodgson's work; 2003-6, for example, saw the first complete *Collected Fiction of William Hope Hodgson*, published in five volumes.¹ The last ten or twenty years have also seen a small amount of critical analysis in publication—by Kelly Hurley, for example—of varying length and detail. There remains considerable work to be done to furnish Hodgson's fiction with the attention it deserves, however, especially with regard to the recurrent ideas Hodgson attempts to work out across the course of his novels. The four novels form a borderland exploration of themes and philosophies that in Hodgson's hands become a unique expression of *fin-de-siècle* extremes: past and future, body and spirit, progress and regression, horror and optimism. The *fin de siècle* is a crucial transitional time for fantastic literature, after which it begins to transform and sub-divide itself into the modern genres of the twentieth century. Hodgson's fiction of the 1900s encapsulates some of the ways in which this literature expressed the sense of change on the border of a new century.

This thesis aims to address some of the areas of neglect of Hodgson's work by investigating how the literary and cultural climate of the *fin de siècle* (interpreted as the period c. 1880-1914) shapes and influences Hodgson's prose fiction, in particular the recurrent theme of borderlands. Over the following chapters, this investigation takes place through an examination of contemporaneous cultural undercurrents in late Victorian and early Edwardian society, such as spiritualism and perceptions of degeneration, that make up the characteristic climate of the *fin de siècle*. Some of these preoccupations, such as evolutionary theory, have roots going back much earlier in the century and even into the eighteenth. Hodgson was one of many writers of fantastic fiction inspired by such preoccupations. He is further inspired and influenced by the imaginative interpretations and extrapolations of authors such as H. G. Wells, Camille Flammarion, and Arthur Machen, sharing some of their responses as well as developing his own.

¹ See Appendix 2 for full details of this series.
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The main focus of the thesis will be on Hodgson's four novels, especially *The Night Land*, since it is in these longer narratives that Hodgson most fully explores his favourite theme of monstrous intrusion across imaginative and dimensional borderlands. Many of his best short stories play with similar ideas, and a selection of these—such as 'Out of the Storm' (1909), 'The Derelict' (1912), and 'The Baumoff Explosive' (1919)—will also be included. In his Preface to the first edition of *The Ghost Pirates* Hodgson claimed an 'elemental kinship' between his first three novels, and although he saw *The Night Land* as a novel apart, it, too, has a strong kinship with the earlier works. The four novels together form a natural body deserving full attention, and for this reason I have opted to exclude Hodgson's other well-known work, *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* (1913), except where certain elements help to illuminate the main argument.² The thesis is an exploration of borderlands in Hodgson's fiction as a whole, rather than a comprehensive discussion of each individual novel. Intersections exist, as will be seen, between all four of these novels. While each chapter of the thesis will focus principally on one novel in particular, each novel persists in breaking its own boundaries in a perpetual interrogation of their recurrent themes of corporeal monstrosity, other worlds, the enduring human spirit, and the incomprehensible horrors inherent in the natural universe.

A borderland can be understood as an area between other areas, as a peripheral realm, or as a line to be crossed. A borderland can also be understood as an area of overlap, in which all three of these definitions function at once, as borderlands of the body and the mind, of genre and culture, of time and the future, of material and spiritual dimensions. Hodgson's fiction appears at the *fin de siècle*, a liminal and transitional period between centuries and between the Victorian age and the modern. The

² *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* is not a fifth novel, but a collection of six short stories, originally published in *The Idler* in 1910 (see Appendix 1). They are each based around the same 'psychic detective' protagonist, Thomas Carnacki, who follows in the tradition of Algernon Blackwood's John Silence (1908).

characteristics of this period—diverse and changing attitudes to science, faith, psychology, gender, empire, bodies, time—are expressed through borderlands because these allow ambivalent, conflicting, and uncertain responses to coexist and fluctuate. The five principle chapters of the thesis will explore some of these different cultural ideas and the responses to which they gave rise, in the context of the range of imaginative forms emerging in Hodgson's fiction.

Outline of the thesis

Hodgson is a relatively little-known author, and the thesis will begin with some biographical and critical background for the forthcoming discussion of Hodgson's fiction. Chapter One will outline the main features of his life and of his writing career, giving biographical and bibliographical context for the novels and stories under discussion in the following chapters. This will be followed by a review of the secondary criticism and literature on Hodgson, to put his work in its critical context, such as exists. Some of the specific critical areas and gaps to be addressed are also described in this section.

The second chapter will explore some of the cultural conditions of the *fin de siècle*, focussing on those aspects with a direct bearing on Hodgson's fiction. It will also discuss the Gothic literary tradition and the particular characteristics of its revival at the *fin de siècle*. This provides a basis for some of the key themes of later chapters, in which the discussion will be more fully expanded. Chapter Two will consider the implications of evolutionary theory as perceived by different schools of thought at the end of the nineteenth century: social Darwinism, human progression, entropy, and degeneration theory. These implications were compounded by physical and astronomical discoveries that, in some minds, linked the evolution of the human species to the future decline of the solar system. This chapter will also discuss the *fin de siècle* as a time of changing domestic and international politics, including perceived threats

from socialism and anarchism at home as well as from other nations and the more troubled colonies of the Empire abroad.

All these undercurrents influenced the fiction of the time, and the Gothic of the *fin de siècle* plays with themes of entropy and evolution, as in Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), regression and mutability, as in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and empire and invasion, as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) or H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). Many themes identifiable in these famous examples of the literature are also addressed, adapted, and revised in Hodgson's fiction, and this thesis concentrates on the strongest of these themes. The literary contexts of imperialism and detective fiction, for example, play a part in an overall evaluation of Hodgson's output, but do not form a major point of focus here. The subsequent five chapters will focus on the ideas deriving from the discourses of entropy, evolution, and psychological research and occultism, which all affect the expressions of borderlands in Hodgson's novels.

Chapter Three explores the borderlands between worlds that preoccupy many examples of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic fiction. *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land* are examined in terms of the occult and spiritualist discourses that influence the presentation of movement across borderlands, and are compared to Wells's 'The Plattner Story' (1896) and Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894). Chapter Three will argue that for Hodgson the realms beyond the physical world contain horrors that can never be understood. The horror of human insignificance is exposed by the encounter with the inexplicable terrors of the immaterial 'other', and humanity itself becomes distorted by this encounter with its own reflections.

Chapter Four turns to the borderland of the sea, examining how in nineteenth-century fantastic fiction the sea becomes a liminal area of uncertainty and possibility, adopted by many authors including Wells and Edgar Allan Poe. Hodgson, however, uses the sea not only as an area where the limits of probability can be reasonably stretched, but as a

region of weakened boundaries, in which storms can rend the boundaries between metaphysical dimensions as easily as they can water or clouds, and ships can drift in and out of unchartable borderlands. This chapter examines how the eponymous pirates of *The Ghost Pirates* function as liminal entities, as both supernatural ‘ghosts’ and natural beings. It also explores maritime superstitions of the phantom ship and argues that Hodgson brings these legends to new life, shaped by the theories of late Victorian spiritualism and psychical research, and by the prospect of the terrors of the natural universe that lie beyond the boundaries of the world.

In Chapter Five, Hodgson’s corporeal monsters, which subvert boundaries of shape and identity, are explored. Evolutionary theory, liminal bodies, mutability, and monstrous landscapes will be discussed, particularly in *The Night Land* and *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’*. This chapter will argue that unlike the monstrous individuals of much *fin-de-siècle* Gothic (such as Stevenson’s Hyde, or Machen’s Helen Vaughan from *The Great God Pan*), Hodgson, like Wells, produces monstrous *species* consistent with environmental adaptation. However, while sometimes sharing the biological neutrality of Wells’s creations which become monstrous through the eyes of human observers, Hodgson’s monsters are often endowed with an essential monstrosity which is exuded rather than constructed by their misshapen appearance. Hodgson’s monsters are borderland entities, existing on the boundaries of shape and form, but also on the boundaries of uncertain moral and spiritual registers.

Chapter Six will focus on *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland* to explore Hodgson’s interpretation of the perceived implications of entropy and evolution for imagining the long-term future of the planet. In *The Night Land*, Hodgson follows *The Time Machine* in adopting a future history based both on Darwinism and on Thomson’s estimate in millions of years for the remaining life of the sun. However, like Camille Flammarion’s *Lumen* (1872) and *Omega: the last days of the world* (1894), Hodgson’s vision goes beyond the end of the sun, and despite the effects of entropy new

sources of regeneration lead to a cyclical interpretation of the life of the universe. In *The Night Land*, Hodgson explores the sense of isolation and insignificance that accompanies the recognition of humanity's limited place in the future of the universe. X's journey across the Night Land enacts the struggle to maintain a human identity in relation to the world, caused by the alienating effects of entropy and darkness, reflecting the pessimistic malaise characterising aspects of *fin-de-siècle* culture.

Chapter Seven returns to the cosmology and philosophy of *The Night Land*. It examines the means by which Hodgson's future civilisation resists the pressures of the evolutionary process through social discipline and psychic development. It will also argue that *The Night Land* proposes a dualistic universe of good and evil based on natural forces rather than on supernatural or divine powers: a universe compatible both with modern materialism and with the human need for essential cosmological meaning. Through this, *The Night Land* encapsulates Hodgson's obsession with borderlands: not only those of body and spirit, but also those of the incomprehensible possibilities, both terrible and transcendental, of the universe itself.

Through these five chapters, this thesis explores Hodgson's compulsive preoccupation with the borderlands of the world and of human experience. In his fiction, Hodgson presents an array of borderline experiences. His novels and stories demonstrate that boundaries are permeable, bodies are unstable, time is unlimited, and evolution is ambiguous. This thesis explores not only the factors that shaped Hodgson's presentation of these themes but also the significance of the ambivalent natural universe, at once menacing and promising, anthropocentric and terribly other, monolithic and manifold, fractured along the borderlines of the physical and the spiritual worlds.

Chapter One

Hodgson's life and career

A note on sources of biographical and bibliographical information

Biographical material on William Hope Hodgson is limited mainly to three sources: a long introduction by science fiction critic Sam Moskowitz to a collection of Hodgson's short stories, *Out of the Storm* (1975), a booklet by R. Alain Everts titled *Some Facts in the Case of William Hope Hodgson: Master of Phantasy* (1987), and, more recently, *The Wandering Soul* (2005), compiled by Jane Frank.³ These three publications contain invaluable information on Hodgson and represent a substantial amount of previous effort to document his life.

There is no official archive of Hodgson's papers. R. Alain Everts derived his biographical essay mainly from the records and materials of Hodgson's surviving family: brother and sister Chris and Mary, and nephews D. Hope Waitt and Hope C. Hodgson (Everts 1). In the early 1970s Everts made these materials available to Lin Carter, so that Carter's *Imaginary Worlds* (1973) contains perhaps the first accurate biographical note on Hodgson. Carter acknowledges that in the Arkham House (1946) and Ballantine (1971-2) editions of Hodgson's novels (the introduction to the latter written by Carter) some 'Derlethian and Koenigian inaccuracies' had crept in (Carter 243-4). These errors seem probably due to the limited information about Hodgson available to H. C. Koenig when he 'discovered' Hodgson in the 1930s.⁴ The precise

³The title of Everts's booklet refers to Edgar Allan Poe's short story, 'Some Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' (1845). The influence of Poe's techniques as well as some subject matter can be seen in Hodgson's own short stories, as later chapters explore.

⁴ See Moskowitz's essay 'The posthumous acceptance of William Hope Hodgson' in *The Haunted Pampero* for an account of Koenig's role in establishing Hodgson's reputation in the USA in the 1930s through articles in *The Fantasy Fan*.

history of Everts' archive and its relationship to that of Moskowitz, who published his biographical introduction to *Out of the Storm* in 1975, only two years after *Imaginary Worlds*, is not clear, but evidently since the 1970s much more accurate information has been available.

Moskowitz possibly acquired his Hodgson materials from A. J. A. Dudley, who, Moskowitz reports, inherited the literary estate in 1959 from his sister Frances, who had inherited it from her friend Lissie, Hodgson's sister.⁵ These included manuscripts, letters, and publishing logs, upon which Moskowitz based his *Out of the Storm* introduction. He followed this biography with two further introductory essays in the short story collections *The Haunted Pampero* (1991) and *Terrors of the Sea* (1996). These essays describe the posthumous publication and recognition of Hodgson's work and the fate of his legacy in the hands of those who inherited his literary estate.

Since Moskowitz does not include any list of references, it is difficult to know the exact extent or content of this archive, which can only be surmised from the information he presented. After Moskowitz died in 1997, Jane and Howard Frank acquired his Hodgson archive at auction (Frank 3). Jane Frank then compiled and introduced *The Wandering Soul*, a treasure-trove of previously unpublished poems, short stories, wartime articles, photographs and other valuable materials from Moskowitz's collection such as Hodgson's sea log from his time on the *Canterbury* in 1898. Finally, most of Hodgson's other non-fiction articles and some letters have been collected by Sam Gafford in *The Uncollected William Hope Hodgson*, Vol. 1 (1995), another useful

⁵ See Moskowitz's essay 'Roadblock to recognition' in *Terrors of the Sea* for a full account of the fate of Hodgson's estate. After Betty's death in 1943, the literary estate passed to Hodgson's sister Lissie. She lacked Betty's confidence in dealing with the publishing industry, and was far less amenable to giving permission for further publications. He remarks: 'Were William Hope Hodgson's literary reputation left solely in the hands of his sister, there wouldn't be any. His revival after the death of his wife was forced against her blocking tactics by non-related enthusiasts' ('Roadblock to Recognition' 37). The efforts of Betty, Koenig, and later August W. Derleth led to short stories appearing in the 1920s and 30s, and new editions of Hodgson's novels published by Arkham House in 1946 (see Appendix 2).

source of primary material. Moskowitz's introductions also contain bibliographical material, including dates and magazine titles for many of Hodgson's short stories, and some information on sales and income. Further bibliographical information has been derived from Doug Anderson *et al.*, 'William Hope Hodgson: A Bibliography', a comprehensive bibliography of editions of prose and poetry, reprints, translations and criticism up to about 1994, from Joseph Bell's *An Annotated Bibliography*, and from Frank's *The Wandering Soul*.⁶

Early life and sailing career

Born in 1877 in Essex, William Hope Hodgson was the son of Lizzie Sarah Brown and Samuel Hodgson, an Anglican clergyman. Of their twelve children, three died in infancy, leaving 'Hope', as he was known, the second eldest son. Samuel Hodgson moved between several parishes with his family, spending a few years in Ireland, before eventually settling in Blackburn, Lancashire in 1890. In 1892 Samuel died of throat cancer, leaving the family on the edge of poverty until the elder children were able to work and their mother inherited money from Hodgson's paternal grandfather in 1900. Appendix 3 gives a chronology of the main events in Hodgson's life.

Hodgson's formal education was patchy. He went to school in Margate between 1885 and 1889, and against his father's wishes ran away to sea in 1891. Through the intervention of his uncle Hodgson became an apprentice in the Merchant Navy.⁷ He finished his apprenticeship in 1895, intermittently attending the Technical School in Blackburn during the early 1890s to get his third mate's certificate, or 'ticket'. After qualifying as a mate he sailed three times around the world with the Merchant Navy before returning permanently to Blackburn in 1898. Hodgson's two favourite hobbies

⁶ Vol. 2 of Gafford's booklet contains three previously uncollected short stories, 'Judge Barclay's Wife', 'Jack Gray, Second Mate', and 'The Albatross'.

⁷ Interestingly, Joseph Conrad also went to sea at a young age, facilitated by his uncle. He joined the French Merchant Navy in 1874, aged 16. See Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*.

during these years were photography and body-building. He took up the latter in response to the bullying he had received at sea, and pursued photography both at home and on board. His log from the *Canterbury* reveals that he had his own dark-room on the ship (Frank 79). Many of his photographs are reproduced in *The Wandering Soul*, including the slides used to illustrate a 1906 lecture, 'Through the Heart of a Cyclone'. These included some unique pictures of a cyclonic storm at sea and were published along with an article titled 'Through the Vortex of a Cyclone' (1909), based on the lecture (Frank 31).

Frank interprets Hodgson's attitude to his time at sea as ambivalent, divided between abhorrence of the sailor's life and pleasure in the environment:

While he is thought to have bitterly hated the life of a seaman, calling it 'a dog's life', according to correspondence with his brother, Chris, he nevertheless liked *being at sea*—which to him was a wholly different matter. (15)

Life at sea, Hodgson wrote in 1905, was 'a life of hardness, broken sleep, loneliness, separation, and discomfort. It is indeed a thankless life, without even the common rewards of industry' ('Is the Mercantile Navy Worth Joining?—Certainly Not' 156). Frank describes Hodgson's enthusiasm for photography and the lectures he gave using his own pictures, remarking that 'his compositions are masterful and artistic, showing the power and grandeur of the sea in all its various "moods"' (34). The sea itself inspired Hodgson and became a favourite setting for many of his stories. In 'From the Tideless Sea' (1906), 'The Derelict' (1912), and *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, the sea is a fertile environment producing a range of aggressive monsters.⁸ In stories such as

⁸ 'The Derelict' (about an old ship developed into a carnivorous life form) should not be confused with 'The Mystery of the Derelict' (1907) (about a colony of giant rats).
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‘The *Shamraken* Homeward-Bounder’ (1908) and *The Ghost Pirates*, the sea becomes a portal to other dimensions or the spirit world.

Interests and influences

When Hodgson left the Merchant Navy and returned home to Lancashire, he opened a School of Physical Culture in Blackburn in 1899, capitalising on his knowledge of body-building. Moskowitz records that postcards of Hodgson’s own fine, muscular body were used to advertise the School. In an interview with the *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph* in 1901 Hodgson described himself as ‘a little chap [5’ 4½”] with a very ordinary physique’. After a spat with a bullying second mate, Hodgson records that he ‘resolved to go in for muscular development, and I worked hard and made a study of physical culture, and at the end of my eight years life on the sea I had the satisfaction of transforming myself into what you see me now’ (‘Physical Culture: A Talk with an Expert’ 13).

Hodgson’s advocated method for body-building and health was what he called ‘scientific exercise’: systematic exercises for limbs and lungs which he maintained people of any strength and fitness could carry out to their benefit; the goal was improved health rather than recreation. ‘In short,’ he remarked in *Cassell’s Magazine* in 1903, ‘exercise, properly carried out, develops the whole frame, and imparts new life not to the body only, but to the brain itself’ (‘Health from Scientific Exercise’ 7). Hodgson’s clients included the Blackburn police, but after a year or two, despite his locally famous challenge to escape-artist Harry Houdini in 1902, the business started to fail and he closed it down late the same year.⁹ Around this time he turned his hand to writing. Other than articles and publicity for his school in the local press, Hodgson’s first published pieces were these physical culture articles, also including: ‘Dr. Thomas’

⁹ Houdini escaped Hodgson’s chains only after a lengthy and difficult struggle. See Everts 10-12.

Vibration Method v. Sandow's' (1901) and 'Physical culture vs. Recreative Exercise' (1903) in *Sandow's Magazine* (Moskowitz 'William Hope Hodgson' 26).

Everts notes that Hodgson was health-conscious to the point of hypochondria, and keen on health food (7). His *Canterbury* ship's log records his taking lime juice, presumably against scurvy, and complaining of tooth-ache as well as poor food. Moskowitz, too, remarks on Hodgson's hypochondria, and on his phobia of poor sanitation ('William Hope Hodgson' 25, 45). Hodgson's interest in physical culture, compounded by his obsessions with health and cleanliness, lends to his writing an emphasis on the value of the strong, clean, and intact body. As Chapters Five and Seven in particular will explore, Hodgson's abject monstrosities, often slimy, hungry, and misshapen, horrifically threaten the integrity of the human body. The broader cultural work of physical culture will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Hodgson was an avid reader. Moskowitz lists Poe, Wells, Jules Verne, Bulwer-Lytton, Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling among Hodgson's favourite authors ('William Hope Hodgson' 23). Hodgson's log from his months aboard the *Canterbury* in 1898 indicates some of his reading material: 'May 3rd. ... Am reading Lord Lytton's *A Strange Story*, and very interesting it is' (quoted in Frank 80). *A Strange Story* (1861), like much of Bulwer-Lytton's other work, draws its psychic elements from Victorian spiritualism and psychical research, which Hodgson would later do likewise. Hodgson certainly possessed a copy of Wells's *The Time Machine*; Everts notes that Hodgson loaned a copy of it to a neighbour, probably in Blackburn around 1900. Hodgson wrote a review of Kipling's *Actions and Reactions* for *The Bookman* (1909), while an unpublished poem titled 'Nevermore', about the endless return of rejected manuscripts in a pastiche of Poe's *The Raven* (1845), indicates familiarity with that earlier master of terror, too (in Frank 207-8).

In *Master of Phantasy*, Everts describes Hodgson as 'totally atheistic and quite contemptuous of the Church and religion in general', but also tells us that Hodgson

‘read every book he could lay his hands on on how to write, also on the supernatural, the occult, spiritualism, and contemporary phantasy and horror authors—such as there were’ (7, 13). Everts does not name any writers or texts, but this description of Hodgson’s reading tastes suggests that he was well aware of contemporary theories and beliefs in these subjects, and that he consciously adopted their ideas for his fiction writing. Everts also describes Hodgson as ‘something of a sensitive (in the psychic sense of the word)’ and details two ‘psychic incidents’ experienced by Hodgson late at night at home:

Hope was writing at the dining room table ... his mother came to the upstairs banister and rapped on it as she would do when she retired. Hope heard the door to her room close ... on his way to bed he noticed that the door to her room [was] open, and waking her he discovered that she had not rapped on the banister. Another time a rug was pulled under the door, and there was no one on the other side. (14)

These slight incidents suggest that Hodgson had a genuine interest in psychic experiences. Such themes suffuse his work through reunions with lost souls, as in ‘The Riven Night’ and *The House on the Borderland*, and psychic phenomena such as telepathy, in *The Night Land*. The significance of spiritualism and psychical research to *fin-de-siècle* Britain is discussed in Chapter Two, and its influence on Hodgson’s fiction is discussed in Chapters Four and Seven.

Early writing career

In 1904 Hodgson published his first short story, 'The Goddess of Death', in *The Royal Magazine*. In this mystery, a marble statue of the goddess Kali seems to come alive at night and leave its pedestal to murder inhabitants of the town. The suggestion of the supernatural is emphasised as the terrified narrator and his companion flee a giant 'Thing' with 'a huge, white carven face' that they encounter in the park at night ('The Goddess of Death' 175). However, the narrator discovers that the murderer is a vengeful Hindu priest wearing a giant mask and a mechanism inside its hollow pedestal causes the statue to appear and disappear. Encouraged by this promising start, Hodgson was keen to take up writing as a career. His family moved to Borth in Wales in 1904 and over the next few years six of his brothers and sisters would emigrate to Canada, while Lissie remained with their invalid mother. Hodgson eventually moved to London in 1910 to pursue his writing career.

Hodgson joined the Society of Authors, through which, it is alleged, he met and corresponded with H. G. Wells. Moskowitz claims that through the Society's magazine, *The Author*, 'Hodgson would eventually write to Wells and several times meet him' ('William Hope Hodgson' 28). This assertion is repeated by later commentators, such as Brian Stableford, but is difficult to verify because there is no evidence of correspondence in, for example, Everts or Frank.¹⁰ In 1906 Hodgson had two, slyly humorous articles published in *The Author*: 'Regarding Similar Names', in which he suggested that authors with the same or similar names should have individual symbolic totems to identify them, and 'The Poet v. the Stonemason', which proposed creating a market for poetry similar to those for other trades.¹¹ Hodgson, evidently, was keen to be part of the literary circle and establish his credentials as a writer.

¹⁰ Sam Moskowitz's biography of Hodgson in *Out of the Storm* (1975) describes Hodgson's encounters with the Society of Authors but neither indicates his source nor describes his evidence for believing Hodgson to have corresponded with Wells.

¹¹ Both reprinted in Gafford, *Uncollected* Vol. 1, 18-20 and 20-2.

However, despite his success with 'The Goddess of Death', in the next twenty-four months Hodgson placed just two stories: 'A Tropical Horror' (1905), which appeared in *The Grand Magazine* alongside the serialisation of Sheridan Le Fanu's 'The Room at the Dragon Volant', and 'The Valley of Lost Children' (1906) in *The Cornhill Magazine*. A series of letters written by Hodgson to his friend Coulson Kernahan in 1905 reveal Hodgson's struggle to place further short stories and his despondency at repeated rejection by the popular magazines: 'The deadly and disheartening monotony of an average of nearly three Refusals a week for three years, must be borne to be appreciated', Hodgson wrote.¹² It seems that at this point he turned his attention to potential markets overseas. His next published short story, 'From the Tideless Sea,' appeared in April 1906 in a new American magazine called *The Monthly Story Magazine*, which soon changed its name to *The Blue Book Magazine*.

'From the Tideless Sea' was Hodgson's first real critical success. It concerned the horrors experienced by survivors marooned, twenty-nine years before their manuscript is found in a floating cask, on a wreck stranded in the impassable weed of the Sargasso Sea. This story initiated Hodgson's 'Sargasso Sea mythos' and his reputation as a master of sea-horror, on which he would continue to capitalise. The Sargasso is a mysterious area of ocean in the Atlantic dominated by dense seaweed (in which all manner of creatures could be imagined to live) and characterised by lack of tidal movement, meaning that shipwrecks remained trapped rather than washed away.¹³ In 1905 Hodgson complained of another writer, named only as 'C. L.' stealing his Sargasso Sea ideas: 'The Sargasso, *of my stories*, is mine own happy hunting ground. I have invented it, and have a right to hunt in it. It is true there have been other "weed" yarns, but there has been nothing at all before like to the weed world which I have

¹² Letter to Coulson Kernahan, 14 November 1905, Gafford, *Uncollected* Vol. 1, 36-7.

¹³ The Sargasso Sea was also visited by Captain Nemo in Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1869, trans. 1873).

created'.¹⁴ Hodgson used the central premise of the weed of the Sargasso Sea to create an isolated, unchartable, and fertile environment in which to explore his ideas of terror and monstrosity, as we will see in Chapter Five.

'From the Tideless Sea' was so successful that Hodgson soon followed it with a sequel, 'More News from the *Homebird*', in *The Blue Book Magazine* (1907). It was published in *The London Magazine* in 1911, under the title 'The Fifth Message from the Tideless Sea' (the premise being that the intervening three have gone astray). The appearance of these two stories, along with 'The Terror of the Water Tank' (1907), and 'The Voice in the Night' (1907) made *The Blue Book Magazine* Hodgson's best early market. Between 1906 until around 1910, evidently, Hodgson published the majority of what would become his most famous and acclaimed short horror stories. 'The Voice in the Night', a sea-horror story about castaways who become gradually transformed into fungus forms, would become his best known and most reprinted short story.¹⁵ Appendix 1 gives a list of Hodgson's short story publications, including those published posthumously, up to the 1930s.

The early 1900s, if not lucrative, were creatively productive years for Hodgson. It seems as though much of Hodgson's best work dates back to those early years before he had made a name for himself. His letters to Kernahan also indicate that by 1905 Hodgson had not only written many of his earliest published short stories but had perhaps completed his four novels as well, at least in draft. In September 1905 Hodgson wrote to Kernahan that 'I've just finished my fourth book—Hooray!!! ... the title of this book is *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig"*'.¹⁶ Sam Gafford uses the evidence in Hodgson's Kernahan letters as the basis for his theory that Hodgson's novels were written in the reverse order to that in which they were published. Gafford argues that the

¹⁴ Letter to Coulson Kernahan, 17 November 1905, Gafford, *Uncollected* Vol. 1, 37-9.

¹⁵ 'The Voice in the Night' was anthologised in, for example, *The Mammoth Book of Thrillers, Ghosts, and Mysteries* (London: Odhams, 1936); Vol. 1 of the *Fantana Book of Great Ghost Stories* (Fontana, 1964); and *The Avon Fantasy Reader* (Avon, 1969).

¹⁶ Letter to Coulson Kernahan, 25 September 1905, Gafford, *Uncollected* Vol. 1, 34-6.

order of writing of the books was *The Night Land*, *The House on the Borderland*, *The Ghost Pirates*, and *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*. He concludes that

With each book, Hodgson learns better control of language and more writing savvy and eventually begins to develop his own voice.

This revelation helps us to understand Hodgson's growth as a writer much better. ('Writing Backwards' pars. 15-6)

Hodgson, Gafford argues, moved from 'an explosion of originality that he found to be totally unmarketable' to writing that was easier to sell, as we can see from the relative ease with which he found a publisher for *Boats* (par. 13).

Novels

The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig' was Hodgson's first published novel, about the adventures of the survivors of the lost ship 'Glen Carrig'. It opens with their search by lifeboat for food and water on a barren island: they discover a derelict ship and gradually uncover the fate of its occupants as they are plagued by the same nocturnal monsters, which paw around the cabin at night and are eventually discovered to take the daylight form of monstrous people-eating trees. Fleeing this horror, a storm washes one of the boats into the weed-ridden Sargasso Sea, and onto an island plagued this time by 'weed-men', amphibious monsters best described as half-human, half-octopus. From its entrapment by the weed some way off shore, the narrator and the sailors rescue another ship containing survivors, and they are able to sail home. *Boats* received positive reviews in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Chronicle* in 1907. For the *Telegraph*, Hodgson had 'an imagination presenting us with things as fearsome as some of the imaginings of H. G. Wells', while the *Chronicle* remarked that 'he has the literary touch in a fine measure' (quoted in Moskowitz 'William Hope Hodgson' 53).

The House on the Borderland is perhaps Hodgson's best known and certainly most often reprinted novel (although *The Night Land*, as we will see, seems to inspire the most fervent responses from readers). It formed the title of Arkham House's 1946 edition, *The House on the Borderland and other Novels*; H. P. Lovecraft, in whose name Arkham House was established, considered *House* to be 'perhaps the greatest of all Mr. Hodgson's works' (Lovecraft 83). It is the most obviously Gothic of Hodgson's novels: an



The House on the Borderland
© Philippe Druillet, 1971

ancient house haunted by apparently supernatural forces. The novel purports to be a manuscript discovered by two young men on holiday in rural Ireland, whose story is further framed by an 'editor': Hodgson. The manuscript, found near the site of the eponymous house, which has long since collapsed into a ravine, tells the story of the events befalling its resident, which arise from the house's apparent situation on the borderland between this world and some other, horrifying dimension. Known only as the Recluse, this long-dead narrator writes of his battles with green pig-like monsters attempting to invade his home. Between these struggles, the Recluse experiences dream-like astral journeys that take him firstly to an analogue of his house in a vast arena surrounded by monstrous pantheistic gods, including Set and Kali, and secondly through aeons of time and space to the end of the universe and its two Central Suns. The house appears to act as a portal to another dimension, whence emerge the swine-creatures, but the circumstances of the attacks also suggest the Recluse may be hallucinating and the swine-creatures imaginary.

In Hodgson's third novel, *The Ghost Pirates*, he returned to the sea. *The Ghost Pirates* is a short novel of sustained suspense in which the sailing ship *Mortzestus* apparently brushes against another dimension and is boarded by sinister ghostly figures. These pick off the crew one by one until finally a swarm of pirates from a ghostly fleet under the waves overruns the *Mortzestus* and pulls her down into the sea. This short novel appeared on its own in 1909, and also in a volume titled *The Ghost Pirates, A Chaunty, and Another Story* in the same year.

Hodgson considered his final novel, *The Night Land*, to be his masterpiece. At almost 600 pages long, *The Night Land* is a lengthy eschatological epic of the distant future which distinctly echoes the end of Wells's *The Time Machine*. It is set many millions of years in the future of the earth, depicting a world given over to entropy and long since deprived of the light and warmth of the sun. The first chapter opens with the romance of the anonymous narrator (who will be referred to as X), and his wife in medieval England, and ends with her tragic death. Thereafter, X recounts his reincarnation in the future community of the Great Redoubt, a 'Great Pyramid of grey metal', nearly eight miles high and powered by an electromagnetic 'Earth-Current', which serves as home and refuge for the human race (*Night Land* 34).

In common with other eschatological texts, like *The Time Machine*, Hodgson's novel is influenced by the perceived implications of the second law of thermodynamics, specifically that the fuel of the sun's heat was finite and life on earth would end with the life of the sun. In the cooling world remaining terrestrial life has retreated closer to the planet's still-warm core. Outside the Great Redoubt, the dark landscape is full of volcanic activity and monstrous dangers. In due course, X discovers that in another, smaller Redoubt, lives Naani, a reincarnation of his lost wife; this Lesser Redoubt is threatened, and he sets out across the dangerous 'Night Land' to rescue her and bring her back (see Appendix 4 for a suggested map). Most of the novel is occupied with the account of this journey, in which X must negotiate a Gothic landscape and fight or

escape the monsters that populate it, which include immaterial forces from other dimensions and strange structures like the ominous House of Silence as well as organic monsters.

Later career: short stories

His novels brought Hodgson very little income. A rare surviving letter to his brother Frank indicated Hodgson had received ‘a lot of quite genuine admiration’ for *The Night Land* and the book of the *Carnacki* stories but he had ‘not made one single penny piece’ from them (quoted in Moskowitz ‘William Hope Hodgson’ 111). It was common for novelists, as Wells did, to serialise their novels in a magazine before publication in book format. This allowed ‘writers who lived at the limit of their earnings [to] market the text rather than the book, collecting their journal and newspaper articles into volumes for republication, and rewriting novels serialized in the periodical press for the different formats available’ (Weedon 143). However, none of Hodgson’s novels were serialised. It is unlikely this was an oversight on Hodgson’s part, since he evidently paid close attention to his contracts; Moskowitz notes that Hodgson had ‘carefully inserted in every book contract that the publisher had the right to issue the six shilling-price *only*, and that rights to cheaper editions were retained by the author’ (‘Posthumous Acceptance’ 49). Since Hodgson was clearly aware of the publishing options available to him, it was probably a conscious artistic decision not to serialise his novels, although had he done so he might have made more money and gained more recognition.

All four of his novels were published between 1907 and 1912, and it is after this period that Hodgson’s short story publication proliferated. Everts suggests that after *The Night Land* did not sell, Hodgson turned in disappointment away from the frightening and unique horror that characterised his early career and focussed on money-earning short stories which he was able to turn out steadily (18). Moskowitz, too, comments that by 1910 ‘Hodgson had begun to “hack” it’ (‘William Hope Hodgson’ 85). It is

reasonable to suppose that, since the novels did not make him much money, Hodgson put more effort into producing saleable stories than into pushing his creative limits. Consequently, although he is most famous for his horror stories and the psychic detective ‘Carnacki’ series, Hodgson wrote in diverse genres: horror, mystery, adventure, ‘realistic’ stories about life at sea (such as ‘The ‘Prentices’ Mutiny’ [1912]), love stories (‘The Girl with the Grey Eyes’ [1913]) and even a western (‘Judge Barclay’s Wife’, [1912]). Appendix 1 compares Hodgson’s publications in Britain and the US; he sold many of his stories at least twice, and sometimes with different titles. Hodgson published fewer stories in the US as he became more established in Britain.

In 1910 *The Idler* ran five of Hodgson’s ‘Carnacki’ stories: ‘The Gateway of the Monster’, ‘The House Among the Laurels’, ‘The Whistling Room’, and ‘The Searcher of the End House’. These mysteries were based around a psychic detective, and were lighter and less intense than Hodgson’s earlier horror. These, plus a sixth story, ‘The Thing Invisible’, published in *New Magazine* in 1912, were eventually published together as a book titled *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* by Eveleigh Nash in 1913. A review in *The Bookman* called the collection ‘half-a-dozen of the “creepiest” experiences imaginable’, remarking ‘Mr. Hope Hodgson plays deftly on the string of fear, and his new novel stamps him a fascinating panic-monger with a quick eye for all the sensational possibilities of ghost-lore’ (‘Novel Notes’ June 1913). Later collections included a further three ‘Carnacki’ stories: ‘The Haunted *Jarvee*’ (1929), ‘The Hog’, and ‘The Find’ (both unpublished until 1947, when August Derleth included them in his collection *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder*).

Nash also published two important collections of Hodgson’s sea stories. The first was titled *Men of the Deep Waters* (1914) and contained seven stories including ‘From the Tideless Sea’, ‘The Derelict’, and ‘The Voice in the Night’. *The Luck of the Strong*, a collection mostly of adventure stories, followed in 1916. These two collections must have raised Hodgson’s profile considerably. *Men of the Deep Waters* drew favourable

reviews: *The Bookman* described the collection as ‘stories that, in their kind, would add something to the reputation of any living novelist. They grip you, as Poe’s grim stories do, by their subtle artistry and sheer imaginative power’ (‘Novel Notes’ November 1914).

The First World War

In 1913, the year after *The Night Land* was published, Hodgson finally married, at the age of 35. His wife was Bessie Farnsworth, known as ‘Betty’, whom he had known in Blackburn and who now worked in London in an editorial office of the Harmsworth group. They moved to France, where they planned to settle, but when the First World War started in 1914 they returned to England. Hodgson gained a commission in the 171st Battery of the Royal Field Artillery as a Lieutenant in 1915. Injured the following year, he returned to Borth where Betty had remained, and was recommissioned to the 11th Brigade of the R. F. A. in early 1917. In Belgium, on 19 April 1918, Hodgson was killed by a German artillery shell near Ypres, and was buried there.

After her husband’s death, Betty returned to Cheshire, and for the rest of her life she promoted her husband’s work, including placing previously unpublished short story manuscripts in magazines. Despite the changes in the literary marketplace and the attitudes of readers and writers brought about by the First World War, Hodgson’s fiction retained at least some of its appeal. Joseph McAleer observes that the major legacy of the 1870-1914 period was the organisation of ‘a thriving and increasingly “mass” market in reading and publishing ... in a refined and sophisticated manner, supported by a readership accustomed to light, “escapist” fiction’ (40). ‘Light, escapist fiction’ characterised Hodgson’s work particularly after 1910, when he began to focus more closely on saleable money-spinners than his trademark sea-horror. McAleer claims that one consequence of the horror of the First World War was an increase in the desire for escapist fiction, which would go some way to explain the continued attraction of

Hodgson's work after the war (29). The stories that Bessie published after her husband's death were a mixture of the light adventures and mysteries Hodgson had produced latterly and some further sea stories and 'Carnacki' tales.

Julia Briggs observes that the popularity of ghost stories in particular 'tails off rapidly after 1914': horrors and nightmares were now brought to life in the trenches (165). However, she also notes that the 'new nightmare was no longer of unknown worlds within but of scientific, even futuristic horrors, created by modern technology and exploited either by man, or against him, or both. The realization that man had used science to create a hell for himself was inescapable on the battlefields of Flanders' (Briggs 165-6). In 1918, shortly before his death, Hodgson wrote to his mother about the desolation he had witnessed:

What a scene of desolation, the heaved-up mud rimming ten thousand shell craters as far as the sight could reach, north and south and east and west. My God, what a desolation! ... talk about a lost World—talk about the END of the World; talk about the 'Night Land'—it is all here, not more than two hundred odd miles from where you sit.¹⁷

In some senses, Hodgson's fiction prefigures the 'new nightmare' the First World War brought, alongside Wells's apocalyptic and scientific visions of the future. *The Night Land*, like *The Time Machine*, contains a horrifying future attributed to the errors of modern science, in which the landscape itself is hostile and dark, and humans fight and die in their struggle with their enemies, the degenerate 'Man-Beasts'.¹⁸ The work of

¹⁷ This letter is quoted in C. K. S. 'A Literary Letter', *The Sphere*, June 1918.

¹⁸ Briggs also alludes to the 'Angel of Mons', a series of reported phenomena relating to the supernatural protection of British troops retreating from Mons in 1914 (166); see Arthur Machen's short story 'The Bowmen' (1914). This myth irresistibly if anachronistically recalls the 'Powers of Goodness' protecting the narrator and Naani in their journey to the Great Redoubt (see Chapter Seven).

Hodgson, evidently, had begun to earn its place amongst the horror and science fiction literature of the twentieth century.

Responses to Hodgson and his work

Hodgson has received relatively little critical attention. Scholarly treatment of his fiction forms a short list. Kelly Hurley discusses several of Hodgson's texts in *The Gothic Body* (1996), and 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson' (2001) focuses on *The Night Land*. Amanda Boulter, in 'The House on the Borderland: The Sexual Politics of Fear' (1993), takes a psychoanalytic reading of the novel. In 1987 a pamphlet of essays by Ian Bell, Brian Stableford, Andy Sawyer and others was published, collected under the title *WHH: Voyages and Visions*. Sawyer's essay from this volume was later revised as 'Time Machines Go Both Ways' (1997). Hodgson also receives passing mention in critical works dealing with broader themes: the Carnacki stories illustrate a discussion of psychic doctors in Julia Briggs's *The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (1977), and are mentioned in Roger Luckhurst's *The Invention of Telepathy* (2002) in context of their occult themes. Hodgson earned a place in H. P. Lovecraft's survey and discussion essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1933), Lin Carter's *Imaginary Worlds*, Aldiss's history of science fiction *Trillion Year Spree* (2001), W. Warren Wagar's *Terminal Visions* (1982), and Brian Stableford's *Scientific Romance in Britain* (1985).

In addition to these, Hodgson merits entries, often of some length, in surveys and encyclopaedia of horror, fantasy, and science fiction. Hodgson, or one or more of his novels, appears in, for example, the *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* (1997), Magill's *Survey of Modern Fantasy Literature* (1983), Bleiler's *Science Fiction: the early years* (1990), *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction* (1983), and *Supernatural Fiction Writers* (1985), and in Barron's *Horror Literature: a reader's guide* (1990). This range of titles, if

nothing else, indicates how readily Hodgson's work is seen as classifiable under a

number of different genres of the literary fantastic. These entries, particularly Bleiler's, have a tendency to follow H. P. Lovecraft and reduce Hodgson to the level of a 'flawed master', rarely moving beyond descriptions of his output and reiterated criticisms of his limitations (his language style, his incapacity to depict full characters or other emotions than terror, his fondness for sentimental romance).

There are many other examples of reviews, introductions and short articles, such as Peter Christensen's 'William Hope Hodgson: Carnacki the Ghost-Finder' (1979) in *Armchair Detective* and Steve Behrends's 'Spinning in the Night Land' (1983) in *Studies in Weird Fiction*. One recent doctoral thesis by Lori Campbell, Duquesne University (2002), includes a chapter on *The House on the Borderland*, and another underway by Claire McKechnie, University of Edinburgh (2007-) includes an examination of biological contexts in *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*. Andy Robertson's dedicated *Night Land* website, <www.nightland.co.uk>, publishes many additional essays and commentaries on *The Night Land*, of which the most insightful include Robertson's own 'Sharks of the Ether' (2007) and 'Love in the Night' (2007), and Sawyer's 'Time Machines Go Both Ways'. Of the available material, published both formally and sometimes informally, I have addressed the most valuable for the purposes of each chapter. However, I do not attempt a comprehensive analysis of this varied array of secondary material. The following section discusses existing commentary on Hodgson in the context of each novel and identifies where gaps exist, some of which this thesis tries to address. The next section will also address the perennial complaints about Hodgson's 'archaic' style and 'sentimentality', which have often either deflected or interfered with scholarly treatment of his fiction.

The Night Land

In 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson', Hurley turns her attention to *The Night Land*. She interprets the novel in terms of the *fin de siècle* discourses of

entropy, degeneration, and the regenerative models, such as physical culture and social orderliness, that these provoked. Sawyer's 'Time Machines Go Both Ways' examines the Gothic narrative constructions of *The House on the Borderland*, and the archaic chivalry and romance of *The Night Land*, as well as identifying Hodgson with H. G. Wells as two writers who 'crystallised' the motif of the dying earth in response to 'a vision embracing the end of the Victorian era' (par. 36). Robertson, in 'Sharks of the Ether', discusses the psychic science fictional framework of *The Night Land* and theorises about Hodgson's depiction of the monsters that prey on immortal souls.

All three commentators address the two accusations most often levelled at Hodgson, almost entirely because of this novel, although *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* also receives a share: criticism of his writing style and criticism of his 'sentimentality'. For example, for Keith Neilson *The Night Land* is written in 'a hopelessly ornate and awkward pseudoseventeenth-century language' ('The Night Land' 1106) amounting to 'bombastic pseudo-archaic English' (Bleiler *Guide to Supernatural Fiction* 246). In his introduction to the Gollancz edition of *The House on the Borderland and other Novels*, China Miéville considers the language of *The Night Land* to be 'staggeringly inept' and that '[i]f a committee had been set up to design an unreadable book, they'd probably have come up with *The Night Land*' (ix). In *The Gothic*, David Punter and Glennis Byron describe the novel as 'almost impenetrably written, in a new language Hodgson invented (but should not have done)' (126). The following example illustrates *The Night Land*'s unique descriptive style, at a point where X is about to take his last glimpse of the lit-up Great Redoubt and continue into the darkness towards Naani:

Now, as I did stand there, looking downward into the Dark, and often backward unto the shining of the Final Light, and put to a horrid desolateness, behold! there came the low beating of the Master-Word in the Night. And it did appear as that it had been sent to give me courage and

strength in that moment; and did seem to my fancy that surely it did come upward unto me from out of the mighty blackness into which the Great Slope ran. Yet could this have been but a belief; for the aether doth have no regard unto direction to show you whence the spiritual sound doth come; and this did my Reason know full well. (*Night Land* 200).

It is difficult to read, but the vocabulary itself is straightforward enough, far from being 'ornate' or 'bombastic'. Problems of readability lie rather in the wordy grammatical structure, the strings of semi-colons, and the insistence on the past emphatic tense, not helped by the smattering of 'doths' and 'untos'. For Darrell Schweitzer, exploring this generic tendency in an essay titled 'Prithee Sirrah, what Dosttous mean by Archaic Style in Fantasy?', Hodgson's 'questionable' grammar and 'imprecise description' make *The Night Land* 'one of the least-finished works in all fantasy literature, penetrated only by a brave few' (47-8).

For some critics, these perceived drawbacks have either marred or entirely spoiled what is otherwise supposed to be a masterpiece of brooding horror. Bleiler, for example, feels that the language 'destroys any mood that might have arisen from the monumental concepts' (*Science Fiction* 365). Others take a more measured view. Ian Bell responds to such arguments by claiming that 'style and content are inextricably linked; to praise the latter while denigrating the former is to do a disservice to Hodgson in his valiant attempt to communicate his overwhelming vision to his readers' (40). Miéville, with a rhetorical nod to Hodgson's style, continues 'And yet *The Night Land* is one of the most extraordinary works in the English language' (ix). For Neilson, 'the author's imaginative powers are so strong that they overcome one's resistance to a narrative style that seems almost deliberately unreadable' (1106). Hodgson manages to sustain this style consistently for over 500 pages, suggesting deliberation and considerable work rather than mere 'ineptness'.

W. Warren Wagar suggests that the ‘faux medievalism... can also be read as an attempt to imagine how the English language will have transformed itself in times far to come’ (‘A Question’). Ian Bell goes so far as to argue that the style ‘presents few (if any) difficulties’, and is crucial for establishing the novel’s ‘distinctive (and all-important) sombre atmosphere’ (40). Sawyer proposes that *The Night Land*’s ‘overt strangeness suggest[s] that we are in a world where the normal laws of narrative language (not to mention sexuality) no longer apply’, a tale of knighthood sitting uneasily between medieval chivalry and a future ‘world in terminal decay’ (pars. 31-3). This is not to claim, as these critics indeed do not, that these decisions are entirely successful. The style is off-putting, until one gets used to it (which is perhaps the only way the novel’s vast length works in its favour), and after X finds Naani their endless flirting, kissing, and quarrelling undoubtedly requires patience.

Consequently, criticism of *The Night Land*’s style is often followed by attacks on Hodgson’s treatment of the love relationship between X and Naani. ‘Cloying’ and ‘embarrassing’, revealing Hodgson’s ‘extreme and archaic’ views on gender relations, says Neilson (1109), these scenes are ‘beyond acceptance’ (Bleiler *Science Fiction* 365), and even ‘extraneous’ (Sullivan 248). They mar the novel with ‘artificial and nauseously sticky romantic sentimentality’ (Lovecraft 84), which, Stableford agrees, ‘cannot help but strike the modern reader as appalling in their sickly sentimentality and their reflection of Victorian sexual mythography’ (*Scientific Romance* 99). For example:

she leaned her head against my breast, and put up her lips to be kist; as that she did be a child-maiden; yet when I kist her, she did be a woman, and to kiss me very dear and loving, and to look at me then from under her eye-lids; and sudden to make a dainty growling, and to pretend that she did be a fierce thing that should be like to eat me; and I to be utter feared, as you

shall think, and to be scarce able that I kiss Mine Own Pretty Fierce One,
because that I did laugh so hearty. (*Night Land* 397-8)

This is a randomly chosen and fairly typical example. Hodgson's choice of such chaste and demonstrative affection between his hero and heroine is catalysed by his choice of style to produce the 'cloying' effects that critics have found so 'nauseating' and which Sawyer compares to 'entries in "Bad Sex Writing" competitions' (par. 29). Nor is this effect allayed by the regular repetition of such scenes throughout the second half of the book.

While a certain amount of distaste (and ridicule) for these scenes is understandable, to dismiss them as 'extraneous' is to miss the point entirely. The message of eternal love is absolutely essential to Hodgson's purpose, even if it fails to grip readers with the same enthusiasm. Robertson defends Hodgson on this point: although the depiction of the relationship is 'a total disaster, compounded of shamefaced lubricity, weakly sadistic fantasies of domination, and preposterous idealisation', Hodgson's presentation of erotic love was a serious attempt to portray his belief that 'human beings find salvation and paradise in their relationship with each other' in the eternity of love ('Love in the Night' pars. 12, 22). Ian Bell similarly observes that 'love... is the motivating factor' of the novel (39), while Sawyer defends Naani's role as the 'dainty' female counterpart to the heroic male, reading *The Night Land* as a chivalric romance: 'We must remember the English of Malory, with its "wit you well," "that should little need," and "Then the king, at the queen's request, made him to alight and to unlace his helm"' (par. 31). For Sawyer, the "'Gilbert and Sullivan" eroticism is precisely the weakest part of the novel', but X and Naani fit the stock characters of the knight rescuing the damsel in distress (par. 28).

Kelly Hurley uses the frequent occasions of violence directed at Naani to challenge Stableford's accusations of 'sentimentality'. She observes that the love scenes are

sadomasochistic rather than ‘sentimental’, presenting ‘the male/ female distinction as one that is on the one hand natural and on the other needs to be maintained by a little light discipline and bondage. The narrator must prove his masculinity not only by battling monsters, but also by taming his wayward and “naughty” maid’ (‘Modernist Abominations’ 142). Hurley also argues that these scenes read like ‘camp parody’ and that ‘Hodgson was more playful than dogmatical about sexual difference’ (144-5). The controversy, then, over such problematic scenes has in fact generated a positive multiplicity of interpretations of Hodgson’s presentation of his hero and heroine, beyond its superficial oddities. The relationship is an integral part of Hodgson’s philosophy, as Chapter Seven further explores. Furthermore, it reflects, as Hurley’s essay posits, *fin-de-siècle* anxiety over the apparent fluidity of gender roles which Hodgson perhaps counters or perhaps explodes through his constructions of ‘man’ and ‘maid’.

I follow these scholars in viewing *The Night Land*’s characteristics as crucial and integral parts of Hodgson’s work, despite their peculiarities. Hodgson’s unusual style is in keeping with the subject matter of an unusual novel. What it takes away in readability it adds in the atmospheric and distancing effects required of such a remotely situated Gothic epic. If Hodgson had written in normal contemporary English, we would be far less prepared to believe that we held a story from twenty million years in the future in our hands. It is quite possible that more has been written about Hodgson’s style than any other single aspect of *The Night Land*, but this must be balanced against the acknowledgements of the unique visionary power of the novel’s physical and metaphysical horror. For these reasons, *The Night Land* is the most problematic of Hodgson’s novels, and the most passionately admired as well as criticised.¹⁹ Lovecraft

¹⁹ Even more than *The House on the Borderland*, *The Night Land* inspires a cult following. Andy Robertson’s extensive website <www.thenightland.co.uk> is devoted to *The Night Land* and hosts resources—including a timeline and maps—criticism, artwork, and fan fiction. The power of Hodgson’s vision still resonates in the
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also described *The Night Land* as ‘one of the most potent pieces of macabre imagination ever written’ (84). W. Warren Wagar claimed it as ‘the most beloved book in my private Valhalla of imaginative literature’ (*Terminal Visions* 21). Critics like Bell, Sawyer, Hurley, and Robertson have offered valid and persuasive defences and interpretations of the ‘problems’ of *The Night Land*: an essential and unavoidable task given the efforts put in by Hodgson’s earlier detractors. Hodgson scholarship is hopefully now in a position to continue moving beyond these discussions; it is one of the purposes of this thesis to continue this process.

The House on the Borderland

The House on the Borderland has generated far less controversy than *The Night Land* and yet in many ways it has attracted more attention. Lovecraft, cited earlier, considered it Hodgson’s best novel. In recent times, it has been the subject of a graphic novel by Simon Revelstroke and Richard Corben (2003) and inspired Iain Sinclair’s *Radon Daughters* (1994). The Gothic credentials of *The House on the Borderland* draw particular attention, especially the significance of its framing narratives by editor and the two gentlemen who find the manuscript.

Darryl Jones has explored the novel in terms of the representation of Welsh and Irish ‘natives’ in Celtic Gothic film and fiction, arguing that the attacking swine-creatures, ‘while not “articulate-speaking men”, nevertheless speak their own subhuman language’ akin to the ‘jabbering’ of the local Irish villagers experienced by the two gentlemen (13). Amanda Boulter’s ‘*The House on the Borderland: The Sexual Politics of Fear*’ explores the different ‘borderland’ interpretations of the narrative and reaches a similar conclusion: ‘Is it possible that these swine creatures that attack the house are in

contemporary imagination and two volumes of new stories inspired by *The Night Land*, edited by Robertson, are published: *William Hope Hodgson's Night Lands, Volume One: Eternal Love* (Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003) and *Volume Two: Nightmares of the Fall* (Brighton: Three-Legged Fox Books, 2007). A third volume is planned.

fact representations of Irish peasants, living and starving around the house of the English landlord?' (28). Hodgson's multilayered narrative structure contains multiple interpretations; Boulter also identifies the unreliability of the Recluse's account of his story, since his sister cannot see the swine creatures. The sister enacts another version: 'the story of a woman locked away by a frenzied and violent brother, frightened for her life... it is her reaction that questions the Recluse's sanity' (29). Boulter and Jones have both differently interpreted the significance of the underground Pit underneath the house from which the creatures emerge. While Jones sees the Pit as an 'omphalos', a geomantic convergence of forces (1), Boulter reads it as an expression of repressed desire, seeing the novel as 'both a psychological enactment of sexual anxiety and a fantastic, fatalistic response to the massive changes harboured by the twentieth century' (27, 33).

The contrast between the Gothic story of the haunted house menaced by supernatural forces, and the fantastic, or science fictional, astral journey interludes has also been noted. As Wolfe puts it: 'Some critics have taken such interpolations to be an almost fatal flaw in an excellent horror novel, while others have viewed it as a passage of visionary genius weakened by the tawdry Gothic tale that surrounds it' ('The House on the Borderland' 744). Like *The Night Land*, however, Hodgson 'conceived of his novel as a unity' and 'sought to provide... a cosmological superstructure for the obsessive horror' of his work (744). In this thesis, Chapter Three returns to *The House on the Borderland* in a discussion of the crossing of boundaries between worlds, and explores the Recluse's experiences in terms of Theosophist and occultist discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It will argue that both the astral journeys and the invasions from the Pit constitute a search for the meaning that lies beyond the physical world, which takes the borderland forms of both inexplicable horror and spiritual consolation. This is a vision Hodgson continues in *The Night Land*, shaped by

his personal philosophies as well as by the often conflicting anxiety and optimism of the *fin de siècle*.

The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig' and The Ghost Pirates

The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig' and *The Ghost Pirates*, Hodgson's two sea-horror novels, have received the least critical attention, which is in many ways surprising given the acclaim Hodgson has received for his mastery of short sea-horror in 'The Derelict' and 'The Voice in the Night'. The two novels are in a similar vein to these stories. *Boats* is Hodgson's only full novel based on his Sargasso Sea mythos. The weed continent is an 'abominable place of lonesomeness and desolation', but it is home to a profusion of monsters: weed-men, devil fish, giant crabs. In *The Gothic Body*, Hurley takes many examples from *Boats* and *The Night Land*, as well as some of Hodgson's short sea stories including 'The Voice in the Night', 'From the Tideless Sea', and 'The Derelict', in her study of monstrous bodies in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic and how they have been shaped by *fin-de-siècle* anxieties around evolution, race, and threats to the integrity of the human shape.

To my knowledge there has been no critical assessment of *The Ghost Pirates* beyond its inclusion in *The Survey of Modern Fantasy Literature*: contributed by Brian Stableford, who calls it 'an adequate tale of suspense and an interesting period piece recalling the last years of the Age of Sail' which acquires significance through its place in Hodgson's conceptual 'trilogy' (Stableford 'The Ghost Pirates' 603). *The Ghost Pirates* does share many parallels with the other novels, including *The Night Land*, through its expression of the horror that lies beyond the fragile boundaries of our world. However, it is also significantly influenced by the theories of late Victorian psychical research, and draws extensively on maritime superstitions and legends of the phantom ship, including the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Frederick Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* (1839). Chapter Four shows how Hodgson contemporises these old traditions for a

modern age and how the shifting borderland of the sea provides the ideal setting for fantasies of transition between worlds.

Hodgson, retrospectively at least, described his first three novels as a trilogy. In his Preface to the 1909 edition of *The Ghost Pirates*, Hodgson wrote that ‘though very different in scope, each of the three books deals with certain conceptions that have an elemental kinship’ (*Ghost Pirates* 9). There appears to be something of a consensus that this kinship is to do with ‘borderlands between dimensions, through which strange creatures from other realms can enter the familiar world’, according to Neilson on *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’* (‘Boats of the “Glen Carrig”’ 143). Similarly, ‘the Earth may be coinhabited by beings of other dimensions, with certain regions serving as “portals”’, in the words of Wolfe discussing *The House on the Borderland* (744-5). These statements strike an odd note: both Neilson and Wolfe could easily be describing *The Night Land*, which contains many such portals and pandimensional forces, but which Hodgson explicitly excludes from the ‘elemental kinship’. He claimed that with *The Ghost Pirates* he ‘closes the door... on a particular phase of constructive thought’ (Preface to *The Ghost Pirates* 9). Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether or not Hodgson’s final novel really had moved on from these earlier themes, or rather why he thought it had, let us look a little more closely at the kinship between the first three published novels.

The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’, we are told, has been narrated by ‘John Winterstraw, Gent.’ to his son, who then wrote it down, in the year 1757. Assuming the son to be at least around twenty, this would place the action of the novel no later than the 1730s and possibly earlier. *The House on the Borderland* comes from a manuscript discovered in 1877 near the spot where the house had been, but it has clearly been there a long time. An ‘ancient man’ of the village remembers the house and its occupants from his youth, ‘and goodness knows how long back that was’ (201). This is deliberately vague.

However, the Recluse lived in the house for ten years before his disastrous adventures

began (117). If an ‘ancient’ man in nineteenth-century rural Ireland may be supposed to be around eighty, and the Recluse arrived in this man’s ‘youth’ rather than his ‘childhood’, then the action of the story may have taken place in the 1820s. Finally, in *The Ghost Pirates*, the *Sangier*, and undoubtedly the *Mortzestus* too, is a windjammer: the name given to the iron sailing ships of the 1890s (Dyson 65).

In these three books Hodgson seems to be bringing his theme up to date, although it is not clear what narrative purpose these carefully distinguished time periods serve. It is possible that it has to do with interpretations of the events. The monsters of *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’* can be interpreted by Winterstraw neither as evolutionary nor as natural beings from another dimension, since these are both concepts belonging to the nineteenth century: their abominable mystery thus adds layers of distance and horror to the story. In *The Ghost Pirates*, on the other hand, the narrator, Jessop, uses the language of late nineteenth-century spiritualism and occultism to describe the pirates as ‘beings belonging to some other state of existence’: their horror derives from the terrible proximity of these two incompatible worlds (50). All three novels are set in the borderlands of the familiar world, into which strange creatures and events intrude. *The Night Land*, however, although nominally still on our planet, is an entropic nightmare world belonging to monstrosity, in which humans are the intruders.

Finally, for Hodgson, although *The Night Land* is, like the first three books, a world of portals and borderland dimensions, these encounters do not form the main point of the story. While the House of Silence, the invisible doorways, the Watchers and the unmeasurable Outward Powers form some of the most fascinating parts of the book, for Hodgson *The Night Land* was ‘A love tale’. His central message, as we will see in Chapter Seven, was one of eternal souls and eternal love. In this, *The Night Land* shares a kinship with *The House on the Borderland*, which explores the same theme through the Recluse’s astral journeys and disembodied romantic reunions. *The Night Land* was a culmination of Hodgson’s preoccupations, philosophies and efforts. A. St. John Adcock, © Emily Alder 2009

editor of *The Bookman*, wrote that Hodgson ‘ranked [*The Night Land*] as his highest achievement and owned he was disappointed that it was not generally regarded as such’ (*Calling of the Sea* 4). As the Preface to *The Ghost Pirates* shows, Hodgson saw his final novel as standing apart from his earlier work. Nevertheless, he cannot shake off his own obsession with borderlands and they affect *The Night Land* in more than one way. X’s visions of the far future, related by his earlier self, defy the barriers of time, death, and the known world. It is this exploration of borderlands, in the Gothic modes which shape Hodgson’s work, that underlies this thesis.

Chapter Two

Hodgson, the Gothic, and the Victorian *fin de siècle*: literary and cultural contexts

Hodgson's writing career, from 1904 to the end of the First World War, places him at the far end of the long nineteenth century. As a result, his work is shaped by a series of literary and cultural changes between the year of his birth in 1877 and the year of his death in 1918: from Victorian discoveries to *fin-de-siècle* anxieties and Edwardian responses. Like his famous contemporaries Wells, Conrad, James, and Kipling, Hodgson bridges the transition period between Victorianism and modernism. In particular, following Wells, Hodgson forms a link between the modern Gothic and scientific romances of the 1890s with the science fiction of the 1920s and onwards. Hodgson's fiction often displays conflicting world-views simultaneously, so that the horror of bodily mutability is set against the essential enduring nature of the human soul, for example. This continual destabilisation of boundaries marks Hodgson as a transitional writer of a rapidly changing historical period, and rewards investigation of his work as an expression of the tension between some of the different discourses of the *fin de siècle* period. This chapter sets out the context and background for the principle themes of Hodgson's fiction. It will show where the preoccupations of the *fin de siècle* start to emerge in Hodgson's novels and short stories, and establish the themes that the later chapters of the thesis will explore in more depth. Hodgson's position as a borderline writer of science fiction, Gothic, and horror will be put into the context of the

literary traditions of these developing genres, which are all affected by the cultural milieu of the *fin de siècle*.

The fiction emerging in the 1890s in these modes is often known as the ‘modern Gothic’: ‘a new Gothic mode... whose narratives focused on the urban present, refracting contemporary concerns through the lens of a literature of terror’ (Dryden 19). In contrast to the wild, remote, and historical tales of earlier Gothic writers like Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe, the modern Gothic was fed by the cultural characteristics of the last decades of the nineteenth century. This chapter will begin, then, by discussing the conditions that produced the modern Gothic from the 1880s onwards—changes in the publishing environment, new technologies, modern urban environments, for example—and the characteristics that distinguish it from its literary antecedents, such as its obsession with bodily form and mutability. This will be followed by a discussion of those *fin-de-siècle* preoccupations that feed Hodgson’s fiction directly: evolutionary theory, solar entropy, imperialism, anthropology, social organisation, spiritualism and psychical research, health and physical culture. These interrelated themes form much of the common ground between otherwise divergent examples of the modern Gothic: imperialism links *Dracula* and *King Solomon’s Mines*, for example, while evolutionary theory connects *The Night Land* and Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896).

Hodgson’s fiction, however, as a product of the 1900s as well as the late Victorian period, also responds to some of the more hopeful beliefs and developments of the new century: the energetic possibilities of radioactivity, for example, or the role of physical culture in reconstructing national health. Although many of his contemporaries, particularly Wells and Machen, shared similar interests, Hodgson’s ambitious syntheses of ideas—the sea with evolution as well as the spiritual borderland in *The Ghost Pirates*, for example, or future utopia with physical culture as well as degeneration and

solar entropy in *The Night Land*—give him a unique place in the divergent development of the literary fantastic.

Literary traditions: Gothic and science fiction at the fin de siècle

Hodgson's fiction draws on a long tradition of Gothic literature, as well as engaging with his own contemporary culture. Gothic as a mode of writing fed a range of literary genres during the nineteenth century, and towards the end of the century underwent a significant revival in response to changing literary and cultural conditions. At the *fin de siècle*, genres of fantastic literature were fluid and mutable; the twentieth century would eventually produce genres more recognisable today such as detective, science fiction, horror, and fantasy, to which the nineteenth-century Gothic contributed. Hodgson's writing moves across the borders of these modes, responding to the other modern Gothic fiction of the *fin de siècle* as well as contributing to the development of these newly forming genres.

Gothic as a genre, or a mode, is notoriously hard to define and is made up of varied texts about which it is difficult to generalise. David Punter observes that from the first the Gothic field shows 'a significant resistance to canonisation' (*A Companion to the Gothic* ix). The novels of the late eighteenth-century Gothic writers, Horace Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis, for example, who are often grouped together, used different approaches and themes. This is one reason Gothic is often described as a mode rather than a genre, because it can appear in texts of different genres. Gothic literature continually transgresses boundaries, while the concept of genre implies fiction bound by sets of conventions. According to Maggie Kilgour, Gothic 'feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself' (4). This intermingling is as much characteristic of the Gothic at the end of the nineteenth century as at the beginning. Gothic is the quintessential literature of borderlands, and Hodgson's fiction develops these borderlands in a variety of ways.

During the Enlightenment, the term ‘Gothic’, with its connotations of barbarism derived from the Goths that provided its name, came to signify ‘a rebellion against a constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of order and unity, in order to recover a suppressive primitive and barbaric imaginative freedom’ (Kilgour 3). Gothic engaged with a reconstruction of the past, or at least with an idealised perception of the past. Gothic architecture, for example, was decorative and elaborate, defying classical norms of simplicity and order and establishing Gothic as rebellious and transgressive. Fred Botting sees Gothic as the literature of excess: ‘Gothic excesses transgressed the proper limits of aesthetic as well as social order in the overflow of emotions that undermined the boundaries of life and fiction, fantasy and reality’ (*Gothic* 4). Through ‘excess’, Gothic is allowed to escape, or transgress, the limits of the real: ghosts cross the border of the worlds of the living and the dead; monsters breach the confines of bodily form; villains exceed the expectations of their role. According to Punter, the Gothic delivers the world in an inverted form, ‘representing areas of the world and of consciousness which are, for one reason or another, not available to the normal processes of representation’ (*Literature of Terror, Vol. 1* 15). The Gothic may express its themes in ways that realist narratives may not, using the supernatural, the improbable, and the excessive in its construction of symbolic worlds.

Gothic, like other forms of fantastic literature, forms a literary borderland. This ‘hinterland’ falls in the gap between realistic and marvellous narratives, as Rosemary Jackson identifies:

Fantastic narratives confound elements of both the marvellous and the mimetic. ... They pull the reader from the apparent familiarity and security of the known and everyday world into something more strange, into a world whose improbabilities are closer to the realm normally associated with the marvellous. (*Fantasy* 34)

Gothic, as a fantastic literature, brought supernatural elements into the prose tradition, but remained distinct from the purely marvellous by starting from a 'secure' grounding which is then destabilised. Jackson draws her conception of the fantastic from Tsvetan Todorov, who argued that for a narrative to be truly fantastic, it must make reader or character hesitate; it must disturb. If it does not, then the story is either too real or too marvellous (a fairy tale):

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov 25)

The Gothic can be seen as uncertain or disturbing because it admits the inadmissible (or tries to), refracting cultural fears but remaining ambivalent, taking a pleasure in the terrors it presents without their ceasing to be terrible. The Gothic is adaptable and continually evolving, because it is based on a constant and ineradicable emotion (fear), deriving from different causes in different eras or situations. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, for example, explores anxieties centred on humanity's biological proximity to other animals that are specific to the post-Darwinian decades of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the use by Wells of contemporary scientific thinking, such as evolutionary theory and vivisection, extends the realistic into the fantastic, destabilising or transgressing the line between what is believable and what is marvellous. Hodgson exploits this unstable borderland through the invasion of real world frameworks by terrifying monsters and situations.

Gothic transgression can also be understood as the expression of otherness, compromising norms. The 'other' that generates fear in a text can be gendered, racial, social, animal, or psychological, and can reveal significant information about the concerns of the text. Fred Botting notes that Gothic emerged during a time of social and political transition and consequently 'resonates as much with anxieties and fears concerning the present as with any terrors of the past' ('In Gothic Darkly' 3). Changing cultural values in different historical periods means that what a society's anxieties are, and what transgression of norms consists of, varies. Using Julia Kristeva's term for the appallingly intolerable and unacceptable, 'abjection', Andrew Smith notes that 'what a society chooses to abject or jettison tells us a lot about how that society sees itself' (*Gothic Literature* 8). Again turning to Wells, Dr. Moreau's rejection of his less-than-perfect Beast-People signifies unbearable aversion for the reminder they pose of the ambiguous boundary between human and animal. By examining those parts of the Gothic texts that are imbued with horror, we can examine expressions of cultural anxieties. Throughout its development, Gothic is identifiable by characteristics of mood, form, themes, and emotional response that have undergone changes over its history but still retain a distinctly Gothic quality.

Hodgson's fiction adopts characteristics of the earlier Gothic tradition as well as those of the modern Gothic. The excess of Hodgson's fiction displays itself in the exaggerated monstrosity of his weed-men and giant Watchers, in the grand cosmic visions of *The House on the Borderland*, in the suspense and impending doom of *The Ghost Pirates*. Hodgson uses ghosts, monsters, and the boundaries between dimensions to represent a distorted view of the world: one in which models of gender, materiality, and humanity are exaggerated to the extreme. His fiction occupies a borderland of ambiguity, of fantastic hesitation. His 'ghosts' are never purely supernatural: the eponymous ghost pirates, for example, exist on either side of a dimensional boundary, as both physical and immaterial. Hodgson's use of remote settings, historical settings,

framed narratives, and archaic style all point back to the Gothic of the eighteenth century. However, his adoption of evolutionary monsters and spiritual invasions speak of the prevailing currents of the *fin de siècle*, and his science fictional visions of future societies and cosmic journeys take their place in the development of science fiction, looking forward into and beyond the twentieth century.

The Gothic tradition and the nineteenth century

From the first texts written by Walpole, Radcliffe and their imitators, the Gothic mode developed into new and varied forms. In the nineteenth century, Gothic finds its way into the sensation fiction of Wilkie Collins and the urban environments of Charles Dickens, for example. The Gothic tradition accrued new motifs and conventions in the nineteenth century: the figures of the double, the over-reaching scientist (the seeker after forbidden knowledge), and the vampire appeared, while as the century advanced, the remote historical and rural settings gave way more and more often to contemporary times and urban locations, or became a blend of the modern and the old. However, Gothic was still characterised by excess, subversion, moods of suspense and terror, and the suggestion of the supernatural.

The early Gothic texts often took place in a distant, reconstructed historical setting, liberating novelists 'from imaginative confinement to the present or the atemporal realms of fantasy' (Alkon 25). The nineteenth-century move to modern and often urban settings led writers of romances, Gothic or otherwise, to different techniques of creating narrative distance. Instead, writers used the alienation created by the modern metropolis or explored the limits of science, terrestrial geography, and time, both past and future. H. Rider Haggard and Hodgson both use distant locations to free their texts from 'imaginative confinement': Africa in Haggard's *She* (1887) and *King Solomon's Mines*, and the Atlantic Ocean in Hodgson's *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*. Similarly, Jules Verne sent his heroes under the sea and into the earth, while Wells's Time Traveller

journeys into the future. These mechanisms allowed fantastic fiction to maintain connection and relevance to the real world while emphasising their imaginative dimensions.

Fin-de-siècle anxieties found regular expression in the literary Gothic. The Gothic tradition allowed for a literal representation of monstrosities, and the dangers of too much scientific enquiry. It had found a new home in the metropolis, usually London, which formed a focus for modern British life and was an ideal location for representing modern fears. The Gothic was a literature of secrets and doubles to which London lent itself perfectly, as the double life of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde exemplifies. ‘In the labyrinthine contradictions of this fluid, indefinable and yet defining setting, the criminal Hyde thrives’ writes Richard J. Walker (*Labyrinths of Deceit* 70). London’s vast geographical size, vast population, and consequent anonymity made it an ideal setting for the Gothic of the modern world.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a confluence of literacy, cultural, social, and scientific developments contributed to a revival of the Gothic mode which influenced various forms of writing from adventure tales and imperial romances to ghost stories and early science fiction. The modern Gothic seemed to be able to capture the zeitgeist of the *fin de siècle* because it could refract unmentionable fears through the use of the fantastic. Dryden points out that for some writers the use of a supernatural or scientific element in their novels allowed them to escape the criticism of pessimism that dogged much late century realist writing because the texts were not intended to seem ‘real’ (4). *Jekyll and Hyde* and *The Time Machine*, for example, commented on many features of late Victorian Britain, from social conditions to fears of degeneration. Their choice of mode gave them an unusual freedom of expression and portrayal; Gillian Beer argues out that as long as the romance writer ‘offers us a congruent vision and persuades us to accept his “impossibilities” he is at liberty to shape experience as he likes’ (*The Romance* 78). Wells himself frankly acknowledged that ‘these stories of

mine do not pretend to deal with possible things; they are exercises of the imagination in a quite different field' (*Scientific Romances* Preface, vii). In a world of increasing secularisation and materiality, the capacity of the Gothic to display or deal with cultural fears allowed it to literalise both material and intangible varieties, while (usually) maintaining a distance from reality.

Hodgson fits into this context because his themes similarly derive from perceived anxieties in the last decades of the nineteenth century. A range of sources generated these anxieties, which literary scholars and historians have identified under such brackets as evolution, decadence, the New Woman, imperialism, urban living conditions, and consequences of certain discoveries of the physical, biological, psychological, and social sciences. The implications of these themes for Victorian culture, novel-writing, and the literary Gothic have been well analysed and documented by many scholars in the last few decades. William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel* (1994), Daniel Pick's *Faces of Degeneration* (1989), and Ledger and McCracken's *Cultural Politics at the Fin-de-siècle* (1995), for example, cover many of the major *fin-de-siècle* preoccupations, and Peter Keating's *The Haunted Study* (1991) thoroughly contextualises the novel between 1875 and 1914. Robert Mighall's *Geography of Gothic Fiction* (1999), Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness* (1988), Linda Dryden's *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles* (2003), and more recently Richard J. Walker's *Labyrinths of Deceit* (2007), focus more specifically on *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, while Luckhurst's *The Invention of Telepathy* (2002) and Parrinder's *Shadows of the Future* (1995), to give just two examples, consider alternative approaches to the literature of the period through, respectively, the complexities of spiritualism and psychical research, and the futuristic fiction of H. G. Wells.

Victorian and Edwardian responses to these cultural undercurrents did not merely take the form of pessimistic extrapolation and predictions, but also directed energy in positive directions: into strands of social, political, and health reform in response to

fears of moral, physical, and national degeneration, into new scientific research, into spiritualism in response to the loss of religious faith in an increasingly secular culture. These expressions of future possibility are reflected in utopian and early science fiction stories of the *fin de siècle*, as the Gothic mode diversifies further into these modern literary forms. Hodgson draws his inspiration from spiritualism and psychical research, socialism, physical culture, and texts such as Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871) as well as from the fears of degeneration and imperial collapse circulating at the same time.

The Night Land, and to a lesser extent *The House on the Borderland*, are not only influenced by many of the same factors as the modern Gothic, but are also early examples of science fiction. The relationship of the modern Gothic to science fiction is close, since the Gothic explores many themes relating to contemporary science. Science fiction, Paul Alkon maintains, is a 'novelistic literature of rational conjecture', while its primary quest is to find 'new sources of the marvellous that will allow literature to maintain its emotional power without turning away from science' (Alkon 12, 3). This adherence to science is, in part, a rejection of the Gothic supernatural as unscientific, but is also a reinterpretation of supernatural borderlands through science, using the theories of Victorian spiritualism to explain ghosts, as Hodgson's *The Ghost Pirates* does, for example, or, as in *Jekyll and Hyde*, using chemistry as a cause of bodily transformation. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898), too, shows Gothic monstrosity interpreted through the rational explanation of extra-terrestrial life. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) was one of the first to offer an alternative rationale in place of superstition or ghostliness, casting the horrifying revival of the monster's dead parts in contemporary science, albeit of unspecified method.

Frankenstein brought the traditional Gothic up-to-date, producing horror and new perspectives on human nature without resorting to the supernatural or Radcliffe's genteel trickery, the 'supernatural explained'. Shelley's pioneering combination of

science with the Gothic mode resulted in the inauguration of both a genre of fiction and a powerful and resonant myth, registering science fiction as characteristic of a modern and post-Enlightenment age. Crucially, however, *Frankenstein* is a Romantic, pre-Victorian novel; its horror is associated with Romantic myth and metaphysics rather than the post-Darwinian perspective that was to mark science fiction from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards. This was the legacy upon which Wells and then Hodgson would later build.

Between *Frankenstein* and the modern Gothic, however, fantastic literature, in its Gothic or incipient science fictional forms, did not thrive in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Generally favouring a short format, fantastic literary modes were disadvantaged by the dominant method of novel publication, which was in the expensive and lengthy triple volume ('three-decker') format. In the mid nineteenth century, the price of a new novel was fixed at 31/6d, or 10/6d per volume, which was beyond the means of most of Britain's middle-class readership (Keating 22). Instead, readers subscribed to a circulating library such as Mudie's, borrowing one volume at a time. This system benefited library and publisher rather than author or reader, and kept the high price of new novels artificially stable: 'The combination of the expensive three-decker form and its tailor-made distributive system, the circulating library, imposed three restrictions on the novel: of price, form, and content' (Eliot 40). In other words, the three-decker form favoured long novels offering a wealth of real world detail, and consequently did not lend itself well to the sort of fantastic and speculative fiction that Hodgson, Wells, and others would produce. Scientific romance, Stableford contends, is 'particularly well adapted to presentation in the form of short stories and relatively short novels' like *The Time Machine* and *Jekyll and Hyde* (*Scientific Romance* 14).

Before 1890, 'the fiction market in Britain was sharply divided, with a wide gap of price and prestige separating the respectable three-decker novel from the popular fiction of the penny dreadfuls and twopenny novelettes' (Stableford *Scientific Romance* 11).

Fantastic fiction was not a respectable literary form; the one-volume novel had a limited market and there was little financial incentive for publishers or writers to explore its possibilities. By the 1890s, however, the three-decker had collapsed as the libraries forced the publishing houses to alter their pricing structures. A host of new and diverse publishing companies sprang up alongside the established ones, and cheaper, shorter novels flourished alongside newspapers and new magazines publishing short and serialised fiction. ‘The decades before the First World War,’ observes Joseph McAleer, ‘witnessed a furious expansion of publishing houses and publications. ... In 1898 *Blackwood’s Magazine* counted over thirty weekly fiction publications costing a penny or less’ (25).

The demand for more affordable novels and periodicals was partly fuelled by an increasingly literate public: ‘the recognition of both the size and the potential—commercial and educational—of the “new” reading public ... encouraged new publishing ventures’ (McAleer 19). Full-length new novels were still expensive, but if ‘new fiction priced itself out of the consideration of very large sections of the reading public, there was certainly no decline in the demand for reading matter, or for fiction’ (Keating 409).²⁰ General demand for fiction was high in the 1890s and 1900s, and some modes flourished particularly. The end of the nineteenth century, Briggs remarks,

represents the high-water mark of the [ghost story] form. Between 1859 and 1930 or so it achieved enormous popularity and was patronized not merely by hack journalists but by many of the major writers of the day.

Its remarkable success was closely connected with the growth of a reading public who consumed fictional periodicals avidly. (14)

²⁰ Keating also observes that this explosion of interest in the short story market led to an ‘important and lasting change in the attitudes of British writers’. The interest of writers such as Stevenson and Kipling ‘was to turn the short story into one of the most admired and successful literary forms in modern fiction and ... it was to achieve its high status in the face of bland and formula-ridden commercialism’ (40).

The 1900s formed a period of buoyancy in the short story market, particularly for the sort of mystery, supernatural, and horror fiction in which Hodgson specialised.

Beginning his writing career in the early 1900s, Hodgson was in a good position to take advantage of the new fiction market generated by the changing publishing conditions of the late nineteenth century, which influenced both structure and content. His short story publication record shows that he benefited from the expansion of the popular periodical press, while his novels, all relatively brief, except for *The Night Land*, were published amid favourable conditions for single-volume fantastic narratives. Hodgson drew not only on the current popular taste for suspenseful supernatural horror stories, but also on the start of the new mode of science fiction established by Wells. As a result he produced fiction in a diversity of genres, which reflect in different ways some of the influential discourses of the *fin de siècle*. The remainder of this chapter turns to the cultural climate of the *fin de siècle* and explores some of the anxieties and preoccupations to which contemporary modern Gothic and science fiction responded.

The Victorian fin de siècle

The 1890s, wrote Holbrook Jackson from the vantage point of 1931, was,

in spite of many extravagances, a renascent period, characterised by much mental activity and a quickening of the imagination, combined with a pride of material prosperity, conquest and imperial expansion, as well as the desire of social service and a fuller communal and personal life. (*The Eighteen Nineties* 18)

Jackson emphasises progress: advances in invention, transport, communication;

expansion of the British Empire; political and social reform. Yet the *fin de siècle* was

also a period of crisis and uncertainty. Victorians looked forward to the new century and enjoyed the benefits of advances in science and technology, but at the same time the rapid pace of change brought causes for anxiety. 'By the second half of nineteenth century,' note Jay and Neve,

the national rail network had covered the country, and local transport was transformed by developments such as the bicycle, the electric tram, the motor car. During the 1890s the first cities in Europe and America were connected by telephone and started to become electrified. (1900 48)

These technological changes transformed the transportation and communication landscape. At the same time, anxieties generated by, for example, economic challenges from Germany and the USA, imperial challenges such as those posed by the Boer War, the detrimental impact of urban living conditions, and the doubtful implications of evolutionary theory for humanity all contributed to a series of cultural fantasies about degeneration and decay.

Evolutionary theory and degeneration

Evolutionary theory fuelled a number of concerns, social as well as biological. The impact of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) increased rather than lessened in the last decades of the century. Gillian Beer argues that 'evolutionary ideas are even more influential when they become assumptions embedded in culture than while they are the subject of controversy' and by the *fin de siècle* evolutionary theory was 'feeding an extraordinary range of disciplines beyond its own original biological field' (*Darwin's Plots* 4, 17). These included not only literature but anthropology, psychology, sociology, art and morality, physics and geology—the list was seemingly endless. Furthermore, evolutionary theory could be

used to uphold conflicting arguments. It suggested scientific evidence for the favourite Victorian theme of progress: as the dominant species, humans, and therefore civilisation, must be improving through the process of natural selection. However, the ‘assumption of universal progress’, as Ray Lankester pointed out, was a mistake: ‘it is well to remember that we are subject to the general laws of evolution, and are as likely to degenerate as progress’ (*Degeneration: a chapter in Darwinism* 60). The laws of evolution meant the survival of those species best suited to the environment, and the environment was subject to change.

The inevitability of environmental change was highlighted by the calculations of William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) about the lifetime of the sun, which he limited to only tens of millions of years in ‘On the Age of the Sun’s Heat’ (1862). Once its fuel was used up, the solar system would grow cold and hostile, unsuitable for human survival in their present form: ‘Retrogressive is as practical as progressive metamorphosis’ for organisms evolving to suit changing conditions,’ T. H. Huxley observed (‘Struggle for Existence’ 199). Both Wells’s *The Time Machine* and Hodgson’s *The Night Land* explore possible fates of humanity under evolutionary laws in a cooling solar system, which are examined in Chapter Six. The future of the human species was therefore limited by the life of the sun, even if it was not curtailed sooner by physical and moral degeneration.

In ‘Man of the Year Million’ (1893), Wells illustrates several aspects of evolution, both progressive and regressive, by tracking human future development. In Wells’s parody, technology and brain capacity both develop, while certain physiological features degrade. Evolution brings

the continual adaptation of plastic life, for good or evil, to the circumstances that surround it. ... We notice this decay of the animal part around us now, in the loss of teeth and hair, in the dwindling hands and

feet of man ... Man now does by wit and machinery and verbal agreements what he once did by toil. (259)

Adaptation to modern life, with its technological assistance and emphasis on intelligence, has left humans as little more than 'great hands... enormous brains, soft, liquid, soulful eyes. Their whole muscular system, their legs, their abdomens, are shrivelled to nothing, a dangling, degraded pendant to their minds' (262). The grotesque description shows a conflict of progression and regression: a Gothic representation of enlarged brain combined with a degraded body.²¹

Wells uses the language and methods of natural selection to ridicule his subject, but he also plays on Victorian fears that evolution could lead to a loss of what was seen as a properly human shape and identity, something with which Hodgson's fiction is closely concerned. Retrogressive metamorphosis registered anxiety about the integrity of the shape of the human body, and found literary expression in the monstrous bodies of the modern Gothic: the slug-squid-human forms of Hodgson's weed-men, Hyde's unspecifiable deformity, or the head-like Martians in Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. The Martians' advanced evolutionary state, with sophisticated technology and highly developed brains, is offset by their degenerate features: their ugly physical appearance and their 'primitive method' of reproducing by 'budding off' the young from the parent (*War of the Worlds* 209-10).

Through the similarities between the Martians and the million year man, Wells draws parallels between Mars and Earth, Martians and humans. The Martians lack not only a human shape, but also are apparently deficient in human values. They are figuratively as well as almost literally heartless, little more than blood-drinking brains, which the

²¹ Wells's speculative essay was reprinted as 'Of a Book Unwritten' in *Certain Personal Matters* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1898), 161-71. 'Man of the Year Million' was first published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and he built on some of its ideas in *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*.

narrator describes as ‘heads, merely heads’ (207). These pitiless creatures are ‘projections of the possible deformity of the human species if present trends towards bloodless intellectualism, the fissure of heart and head, were to continue’ (McConnell 5). The Martians have no sympathy for the human race or any interest in its people or achievements, and in this way they serve as a warning of the moral or mental qualities that humans could lose through long-term adaptation to their environment.

In this way the discourse of degeneration grew out of the increasing recognition that evolution would not necessarily result in humanity’s changing for the better.²²

Adaptation to one’s environment did not only mean the natural environment of the planet, but also the artificial environments created by human civilisation. Evolutionary theory could be used to validate the condemnation of modern life; retrogression was not limited to bodily form. Lankester argued that

It is possible for us—just as the Ascidian throws away its tail and its eye and sinks into a quiescent state of inferiority—to reject the good gift of reason with which every child is born, and to degenerate into a contented life of material enjoyment accompanied by ignorance and superstition. ... [W]e have to fear lest the prejudices, preoccupations, and dogmatism of modern civilisation should in any way lead to the atrophy and loss of the valuable mental qualities inherited by our young forms from primaeval man. (*Degeneration: a chapter in Darwinism* 61)

Lankester suggests that the rapid progress and ease of obtaining quality of life that were seen as positive features of modern civilisation could have dangerous effects on

²² For more extensive discussion of degeneration and evolutionary theory see, e.g. John Stokes (ed), *Fin-de-siècle/fin-du-globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*, William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel 1880-1920*, or Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*.

humanity as a species always subject to evolution. ‘Strength is the outcome of need,’ Wells’s Time Traveller observes, ‘security sets a premium on feebleness’ (*Time Machine* 31). If humans adapt to a life of ease, their fitness to their environment will be characterised by physical and mental weakness, since strength is no longer required.

William Greenslade comments that

Degeneracy allowed fitness, and its double, unfitness, to be spoken of together as a feature of modern life. As the century drew to a close, modern civilisation itself was referred to as a pathological condition—a sickness, immanent and pervasive. (‘Fitness and the Fin-De-Siècle’ 38)

Human mental potential, as well as physical, was at risk, and the germs of destruction, according to some theorists of degeneration, were contained in modern life. Civilisation itself was deemed to be subject to the laws and trends of evolution and appeared, to many in the 1890s, to be declining rather than progressing. In *Degeneration* (1892), Max Nordau identified degeneracy in ‘the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry, in the life and conduct of men who write mystic, symbolic, and “decadent” works’ (15). A more symbolic approach to art, as practiced by aesthetes, challenged the naturalistic perspective on the portrayal of life in literature which had reached Britain through the work of Emile Zola and been taken up by writers such George Gissing in *The Nether World* (1889) (Keating 115-7). The ‘decadence’ of artists like Oscar Wilde seemed to indicate a general malady of immorality in the 1890s, contesting the Victorian perception of their own moral high ground. Keating describes how fears of the corrupting influence of French decadence brought literature into direct conflict with the law. Wilde’s trial and imprisonment in 1895 indicated the prevalence of established rather than developing moral values. The Obscene Publications Act of 1859 allowed for

the destruction of such literature and lasted well into the twentieth century (Keating 242-3).

Smith observes that ‘the ease with which the theory [Nordau’s] crossed the borders of various disciplines, with their different readerships, suggests that the theory was always, in essence, a cultural narrative’ (*Victorian Demons* 14-15). In attacking moral decay Nordau was articulating a fear of the universal applications of degeneracy and the consequent doom this would bring to civilisation. He describes this ‘Dusk of Nations’ in a pessimistic vision of the world’s inexorable decline:

Over the earth the shadows creep with deepening gloom, wrapping all objects in a mysterious dimness, in which all certainty is destroyed and any guess seems plausible. Forms lose their outlines and are dissolved in floating mist. The day is over, the night draws on. (*Degeneration* 6)

Nordau’s Gothic images evoke uncertainty and unease, emphasising the ‘guess’ or the chance upon which natural selection rests. The language suggests an association between immediate degeneration taking place in contemporary life with the inevitable ‘gloom’ of the world that would accompany the heat death of the sun. This image curiously prefigures *The Night Land*, in which ‘the night’ literally ‘draws on’ over a decaying world and X awakes into the future through ‘a blurred greyness’ which ‘would clear and fade from about me, even as a dusky cloud, and I would look out upon a world of darkness’ (34).

However, perhaps the most significant symbol of the declining condition of modern life was the modern city, specifically London. Not only did the modern metropolis produce Nordau’s artistic degenerates, but its living conditions had a physical effect on its citizens. In the nineteenth century, dramatic industrial growth transformed Britain’s cities. Despite its contribution to the economy of nation and empire, this growth brought

problems, including a large working-class population which resulted in a pronounced gulf between slums in the East End and new suburban housing for the wealthier (Dryden 56).

The extent and severity of living conditions in the east end of London was brought to wider attention by people like Andrew Mearns, whose *Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) described a world of filth, squalor, and poverty, riddled with crime and prostitution. Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People* (1886-1903) uncovered evidence that the capital contained a vast population of poor and undernourished citizens and estimated that around 35% of east Londoners lived below the poverty line. Degeneration was not merely a problem of the future or of remote peoples, but was taking place here and now, in the heart of the greatest city in the world.²³

The size of cities and the numbers of people gathered together there had, according to some, a dangerous alienating effect on the mind of the individual. Psychologist Gustave Le Bon examined the workings of crowd behaviour, and in *The Mind of Crowds* (1896) he theorised that when people gather under the right circumstances to form a crowd, 'their conscious personality vanishes. A collective mind is formed, doubtless transitory, but presenting very clearly defined characteristics' (26). Le Bon noted the degenerate tendencies of the crowd mind, and theorised that by being part of a crowd 'a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation (36). A politicised response to concerns about mob power, especially in France, Le Bon's crowd is depicted as destructive and dangerous as his account articulates middle class fears.

In addition to its behavioural qualities, degeneration also seemed to exhibit physical characteristics, leading to attempts at classification. Growth in urban populations apparently led to a growth in the incidence of telling degenerate traits. Degenerates were

²³ Booth's survey was conducted between 1886 and 1903. Two volumes of his findings first appeared in 1889, and by 1903 seventeen volumes were published under the title *Life and Labour of the People in London*. Booth's survey comprehensively mapped and classified living conditions in London in the late nineteenth century, identifying around a third of the capital's population as living below the poverty line.

variously conceived as criminals, the insane, decadents, or the deformed. The work of Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso attempted to separate the ‘eligible body of authentic citizens from its pathological Others – hereditary criminals, cases of atavism and degeneracy, and the criminally insane’ (Glover 44). Daniel Pick records that for Lombroso, criminality ‘was not “unnatural sin”, nor an act of free will, but the sign of a primitive form of nature within an advanced society’ (*Faces of Degeneration* 122). Lombroso himself described the criminal as ‘an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals’ (*Criminal Man* xv). Behavioural characteristics such as violence or licentiousness could be predicted through the criminal physiognomy. Lombroso believed there was an identifiable criminal ‘type’, marked by certain atavistic physical characteristics, mainly the shape and appearance of the skull and head.

Stoker’s Count Dracula, for example, resembles Lombroso’s criminal type, as Mina observes: ‘The Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and *qua* criminal he is of imperfectly formed mind’ (*Dracula* 406). Dracula ‘displays his deviant nature anatomically through his “thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils”, [and] “his eyebrows... very massive, almost meeting over the nose”’ (Glover 67). Furthermore, the fact that Dracula is an aristocrat illustrates the perceived extent of degeneration in society: Lombroso’s criminal type could be identified in any social class or group.

As we will see in Chapter Five, the monsters of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic are often, like Dracula, Hyde, and Machen’s Helen Vaughan, concealed in a human shape but revealed by a few physiognomic clues in their eyes or features. Hodgson, however, and often Wells (in *The Time Machine* or *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, for example), takes his characters away from the urban environment where monstrous degenerates walk in human shape, and places them in remote borderlands in which hybrid creatures combine

human and animal characteristics. The monsters of Hodgson's narratives are as much representative of evolutionary success as they are of the degenerate human form.

The weed-men of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, for example, with their amphibious bodies of limbs and tentacles, are uniquely suited to life in the Sargasso Sea. To the narrator, however, they present an unpalatable analogy of the evolving human body since they resemble both humans and octopi: their faces look 'human save that the mouth and nose had greatly the appearance of a beak' and they have 'two short and stumpy arms; but the ends appeared divided into hateful and wriggling masses of small tentacles' (*Boats* 30, 69). To evolve towards animal forms is to degenerate, from the perspective of the Victorian human shape, but in the Sargasso Sea, human bodies are unsuitable and weed-men bodies are perfectly adapted to the environment. Here, and in *The Night Land*, Hodgson's monstrous forms incorporate multiple interpretations: they can be understood as representing the degenerate human body, and the appropriately adaptable animal body, but also as the supposedly inferior human bodies occupying parts of the British Empire.

Imperialism

Some commentators believed that degenerate traits could also be traced in some of the 'savage' races making up Britain's empire. The conflict between the civilising effects of imperialism, and the degeneration taking place inside the empire is played out in imperialist narratives. The title of Booth's 'In Darkest England and the Way Out' (1890), for example, plays on Stanley's *In Darkest Africa* (1890) to highlight these parallels and argue for social reform. Imperialism, then, could be used as an example of the success of modern Britain, or to highlight its failures. Daly points out that that despite the poor condition of the Boer recruits the empire was still expanding: 'the end result of the war was not only management of the trauma but also an expansion and consolidation of certain power structures' (*Modernism, Romance, and the Fin De Siècle*

33). This expansion was partly due to a change in policy that effectively included annexing inhabited countries as well as imposing British colonies on emptier areas of the globe (Ledger and Luckhurst 133). Patrick Brantlinger comments that

Imperialism as an element in British culture grew increasingly noisy, racist, and self-conscious as faith in free trade and liberal reformism declined. The militant imperialism of the late Victorian and Edwardian years thus represents a national (indeed, international) political and cultural regression. (33)

British imperialism was far from being a stable ideology. Brantlinger suggests an era of change around the *fin de siècle*, demonstrating a characteristic conflict between the potential benefits and disadvantages of imperial maturity and expansion.

The addition of alien nations to the empire appeared to bring problems of xenophobia and fears of invasion and miscegenation. This is reflected in a range of late century ‘invasion fiction’ beginning with G. K. Chesney’s *The Battle of Dorking*, published in 1871, which played on contemporary fears about war in Europe. The conquest of Britain brings an end to Victorian confidence and arrogance and to the Empire’s complacent assumption that ‘all this wealth and prosperity were sent us by Providence, and could not stop coming’ (Chesney 4). Britain is stripped of her colonies, and ‘the proudest nation on earth, which had never known disgrace of defeat’ is reduced to a humble state of degradation from which it never recovers (61). *The Battle of Dorking* initiated a craze for invasion fiction, and amongst the subsequent novels it inspired was *The War of the Worlds*, which acknowledges Chesney’s book by its Woking setting, not far from Dorking itself. *The War of the Worlds* is not only an invasion narrative, but also an imperialist narrative as Wells satirises European conquests of distant countries and the treatment of native races. The threat posed to Hodgson’s characters by the

creatures of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* and the monsters of *The Night Land*, all of which attempt to invade the human sanctuaries of ship and pyramid, also symbolise a threat to British imperialism.

Threats to the British Empire originated not only in fears of invasion by other powers or of contact with native subjects, but also came from within. Modern life was feared to have a detrimental effect on the health and fitness of British subjects, especially in the modern cities where large proportions of the population lived in very poor conditions. Such a population seemed unfit to defend the Empire. The Boer War (1899-1900) highlighted the poor state of national health when the basic level of fitness of recruits turned out to be alarmingly inadequate for service. For example, Greenslade notes that 'In Manchester only three out of every eleven applicants for military service in South Africa were considered fit, and of these, under half had attained a moderate standard of muscular power' ('Fitness and the Fin-De-Siècle' 48). Britain's inability to produce an 'imperial race' seemed to indicate a crisis of national fitness:

a profound unease was generated about the heart of Empire. Fears promoted and kept alive by degenerationist discourse seemed to be vindicated. The national crisis was, in a very real sense, a crisis of the imperial body. (48)

National fitness had wide ranging implications for the integrity of the British Empire. As well as feeding perceptions of crisis, it also fuelled reaction: the promotion of eugenics and physical culture, for example, both strategies of strengthening and improving the race. Both doctrines would later be adopted by the political far right in the twentieth century, but at the *fin de siècle* they took the form of progressive responses with potentially immediate benefits. In *The Night Land*, Hodgson responds to these

concerns around national fitness and security with a civilisation of closed borders and sound physicality.

Eugenics and physical culture

Hodgson derives the social philosophy of *The Night Land*'s Great Redoubt in part from the solutions to these *fin-de-siècle* problems proposed by eugenics and physical culture. Eugenics, the deliberate breeding of desirable characteristics and consequently the elimination of undesirable ones, was seen as a direct solution to degeneracy and grew out of the same evolutionary ideas that had produced degeneration theory in the first place. The 'core concerns of the eugenics debate were developed within the framework of Social Darwinism', which assessed the impact of natural selection and inherited characteristics on society as a whole (M. Thomson 19). Concerns arose that the birth-rate amongst the 'respectable' classes was falling compared to the 'high rates among the poorest and least responsible sectors of society' (M. Thomson 21). Degeneracy was thought to be self-extinguishing, to tend towards self-destruction, and therefore its prevalence would destroy civilisation. The degenerate native of the city was seen as more 'fit' to survive than the gentleman or the rural dweller; there were more of them, and they were breeding more extensively (Greenslade *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel* 42). Francis Galton, who first used the word 'eugenics' in 1883, complained that: 'Those whose race we especially want to have would leave few descendants, while those whose race we want to be quit of, would crowd the vacant space with progeny' (quoted in Greenslade *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel* 24). The goal of eugenics, therefore, was to encourage the breeding amongst the best sorts of people in order to raise the overall quality of society.

Galton's aim was 'to replace Natural Selection with other processes that are more merciful and not less effective' (Blacker 17). In these terms, eugenics is legible in the context of Huxley's proposals of 'ethical evolution', which called for the human race to

take active steps to resist the evolutionary pressures of nature. 'Eugenics,' Galton said, 'is the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage' (*Essays in Eugenics* 24). Eugenics was championed by socialists, and other people who were inspired by 'the hope that at some future time the human race might be largely composed of men and women possessing the illustrious qualities of Shakespeare and Darwin' (Searle 74). Anne Kerr numbers the Webbs, Havelock Ellis, George Bernard Shaw, and Wells among the supporters of eugenics, as well as Marxists, Fabians, and feminists: 'Their emphasis on the common good and their belief in meritocracy fitted with the eugenic ideology of the time' (Kerr and Shakespeare 13). Galton distinguished between 'positive' and 'negative' eugenics; the former being the encouragement of 'good' stock to breed and the latter the discouragement of breeding amongst degenerate or weak 'bad' stock. In America in the 1920s this resulted in a programme of sterilisation of lunatics; later, in Germany in the 1930s under Hitler, eugenics became a programme of euthanasia of the ill or deficient on the basis of economic burden and racial hygiene (Kerr and Shakespeare 24-5).

Ideas associated with political change, utopia, and eugenics responded to perceived threats of degeneration, and are picked up most strongly by Hodgson in *The Night Land*. Wells's scientific romances also explored alternative social orders, both utopian and dystopian in their outlook, and Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) addresses the problems of modern civilisation with a pastoral utopia. Eugenics, or at least the control over people's lives and reproduction that it implies, is picked up and satirised by later writers such as Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* (1932). These ideas feed into the development of science fiction and some texts exhibit a Gothic mood of control, persecution, and horror that persists in the genre.

Physical culture formed another immediate solution to degeneracy. It served a social function by raising the level of human perfectability, promoting all-round health. The

structure of its principles and philosophy were engaged in an effort to rescue the nation, and indeed the empire, from the risk of degeneration. 1890s strongman and physical culture activist Eugen Sandow argued that ‘there is no department in life in which physical culture does not bear a part’ (‘Gospel of Strength’ 6). As Chapter One has discussed, Hodgson was a keen advocate and practitioner of physical culture as a route to overall fitness and health.

Physical culture helped to rebuild the concept of the strong male empire builder and served the continuation of imperialism and the supremacy of the people of Western nations. In imperial narratives, like those of H. Rider Haggard, and less explicitly in Hodgson’s *The Night Land*, the role of the warrior hero is reconstructed in the defence of the empire. Hodgson and Haggard set their novels in environments favouring strength, dangerous places in which there are always enemies to fight. Their heroes represent a nostalgic masculine ideal. Sandow promoted a ‘Grecian ideal’ as the template for male bodily perfection, and he was seen as a ‘charismatic warrior hero’, suggesting the revival of a historical or legendary masculine type (Budd 117). Hurley, discussing the hero of *The Night Land* who delights in battling for the protection of his beloved, argues that ‘The right kind of primitivism ... is also a mark of proper masculinity’ (‘Modernist Abominations’ 143).

As well as the perception of threats to the integrity of the Empire, the *fin de siècle* also brought traditional gender roles under pressure. By the late nineteenth century, the ‘New Woman’ was emerging, challenging these scripts by refusing simply a protected position in the home, asserting her rights to participate in male-dominated professional or economic spheres. At the same time, traditional masculine ideals of strength and power were undermined by other aspects of modern life: new masculine identities such as the aesthete, threats to the empire from foreign powers, and poor national fitness due to city living conditions. James Eli Adams argues that ‘reconfigurations of masculinity... endeavoured to restore the prerogatives of a “manhood” ... that had been

severely eroded by the pressures of modernity' (5). Physical culture responded to perceived threats to masculinity in several ways. Its emphasis on strength provided a literal reconstruction of a masculine ideal, and it could counter fears of degenerating national fitness because it advocated exercise, bodybuilding, and a healthy diet and lifestyle. Sandow promoted physical culture avidly in the last years of the 1890s and early 1900s, mainly in Britain, through competitions, *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, and the display and photography of his own impressive body. Sandow 'represented an aesthetic philosophy ... grounded in an ideology of male power expressed through physical beauty, muscular strength and proportion' (Budd 74).²⁴

In imperial fiction, male heroes hark back to the 'primitive' role of the warrior and defender. Sir Henry Curtis, in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, reminds Quatermain of an 'ancient Dane' he had seen in a picture: 'I never saw a finer looking man ... I thought that if one only let his hair grow a bit, put one of those chain shirts onto those great shoulders of his, and gave him a big battle-axe and a horn mug, he might have sat as a model for that picture' (*King Solomon's Mines* 11). Sir Henry's connection with his possible Danish or Saxon forebears indicates that he has 'the right kind of primitivism' for the warrior hero; he is also a fine specimen of the 'racially pure' European empire-builder, reinforcing the connection between physical and imperial fitness. In *The Night Land*, X himself acknowledges the social benefits of physical culture within the nation-state of the Great Redoubt. He has always faithfully performed 'the Exercises that were taught in the Upbringing of all the Peoples of the Mighty Pyramid ... in all my life, had I taken pride of my body to be of health and to

²⁴ It is difficult to say where aesthetic admiration stops and homoeroticism starts in physical culture media. Sandow's photographs were supposed to be seen as non-erotic; however, Adams argues, '[o]ne of the enabling conditions of the late-Victorian "counter culture" of male desire is ... widely and variously diffused ... in "manly" praise of the male body as an object of aesthetic delight' (153); this is as true for some of Hodgson's fiction as it is for physical culture photography. Budd argues that 'part of the success of physical culture was its assertion of the male body as heroic rather than erotic' (77). See also Hurley's comments about Hodgson's sexuality in 'Modernist Abominations'.

have strength' (355). As the hero of his home as well as of the novel, he is a prime specimen of what such underpinning principles can produce.

Political responses

Responses to the changing times of the *fin de siècle* were not all negative, since they also brought a sense of new opportunities, which influence Hodgson's attitudes to social structure in *The Night Land*. Keating notes a universal sensation of political change at the *fin de siècle*: 'Conservative, Liberals, Fabians, Marxists, Socialists, Anarchists ... were in no doubt that they were in transition: it was on what exactly they were in transition to, and how they planned to get there, that they disagreed' (3). Socialists and anarchists, for example, held conflicting views on the most desirable degree of government organisation. While some socialists sought collectivism and state control, anarchists advocated liberation from the dominion of property, religion, and government.

Despite its implications for individual freedom, the organised state was seen as stable in contrast to the forces of anarchy and barbarism perceived to threaten civilisation. For example, for Rudyard Kipling,

society has the right, even the duty, to make great demands because what at bottom he fears is anarchy and disorder. Conrad's distrust of organized states is congenial to our late-twentieth-century view of the matter. ... It was easier to believe when Kipling wrote that the danger came either from an alien and more primitive society ... or from disorderly forces within. (Hewitt 49)

The organised state seemed to be a safe bet in contrast to the greater threats posed to society. Anarchists took the opposite view, but anarchism and socialism had essentially

the same goals: the regeneration of a healthy and properly functioning society. This was often couched in the same biological language used by proponents of degeneration theory. In 1911 Emma Goldman argued that anarchism ‘destroys, not healthful tissue, but parasitic growths that feed on the life’s essence of society’ (‘Anarchism: what it really stands for’, quoted in Ledger and Luckhurst 216). Goldman’s medical analogy highlights the parallels detected between biological and social forces in the future of humanity and civilisations. Political transformation stood alongside eugenics and physical culture as weapons that could combat the potential causes of degeneration.

T. H. Huxley, as we will see in Chapter Seven, believed the human race could actively resist the potentially degenerative effects of the cosmic process through mutual effort and organisation: a method he termed, in ‘Evolution and Ethics’ (1893), the ‘ethical process’ (85). The use of social organisation to combat physical and biological pressures is adopted by Hodgson in *The Night Land*. Before him, however, a tradition of alternative and futuristic fiction extrapolated these ideas to one or other of their logical conclusions: utopia, or apocalypse. Utopian fiction of the late century illustrated examples of ‘healthy’ societies. William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* depicts an anti-scientific pastoral paradise with no central government, countering capitalist utopias like Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), in which the Boston of the year 2000 houses an organised and centralised society reliant on advanced technology. Wells critiques both methods during his literary quest for utopia: in *The Time Machine*, the degenerate Eloi in their lovely garden evoke a Nowhere gone wrong, while the technologised London of *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) seems to be accentuating rather than eliminating urban class divisions, incubating future Morlocks in its subterranean levels (Wagar *Traversing Time* 67). In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells tries to achieve a balance of city and countryside, of individual freedom and social organisation,

to create what he saw as a 'kinetic' utopia, welcoming 'change and development', and thus able to resist the potential for degeneration inherent in the evolutionary process.²⁵

Other novels extended degenerative fears to their extreme conclusion of the destruction of civilisation. Richard Jefferies' *After London* (1885) describes a regression to a barbaric, medieval society, and William Delisle Hay's *The Doom of the Great City* (1880) depicts the degenerate centre of London destroyed by a rampant plague, while the suburbs survive.²⁶ In *The Night Land*, as we will see in later chapters, Hodgson combines both utopia and apocalypse. The land around the pyramid succumbs to entropy and degeneration while an organised, technological society maintains its sound humanity inside. Hodgson adopts the model of organised resistance to disorderly and anarchic forces, underpinned with principles of discipline, physical culture, and eugenics. Hurley observes that 'Hodgson's depiction of a beleaguered but indomitable nation-state holding its own against the forces of anarchy is legible in a number of contexts, including fascism with its myths of racial purity and belligerent nationalism' ('Modernist Abominations' 141). Hodgson presents his civilisation in a thoroughly positive light, however, and ultimately his purpose is not political but personal, exploring the human experience through spiritualism and his own mystical philosophy.

Spiritualism, psychical research, Theosophy, and occultism

Spiritualism, and the related movements of psychical research, Theosophy, and occultism, provided Hodgson with another source of inspiration. They generated ideas

²⁵ *When the Sleeper Wakes* hovers between the utopian and dystopian elements of the future city, while *A Modern Utopia* also contains suggestions that Wells's 'dreamy paradise isn't necessarily the ideal habitat for the person who imagined it', and displeased later writers like George Orwell and Aldous Huxley who saw the organised world state as dystopic (When xxii-xxiii).

²⁶ These were two of several British disaster novels of the time; others included Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking*, and M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901).

which were integrated into cultural discourse by the *fin de siècle* and were bound up with other contemporary concerns. Evolutionary theory, in addition to contributing to fears about degeneration and human extinction or replacement by other species, also contributed to a loss of religious faith. This was further compounded by other scientific discoveries such as those relating to the geological history of the earth and the expected future life of the sun. The rise of spiritualism in the second half of nineteenth century has been seen as a response to the crisis of faith engendered by Darwinism and the growing dominance of an ideology of scientific materialism. Spiritualism formed a 'potent weapon against the cold question mark deposited by science in the firmament' by offering an afterlife that could be understood (according to spiritualists) within the natural laws of the material universe, albeit ones of which science was not yet aware (Oppenheim 36).

Spiritualism arrived in Britain in the 1850s from America, and was tremendously popular on both sides of the Atlantic, reaching a peak in Britain the 1870s. It posited the existence of a spirit world, with which specially gifted mediums could communicate. Spiritualist séances attracted not only the faithful but also the sceptical. Both groups of séance-goers included scientists determined to unpick the physical laws that generated spirit rapping, moving tables, automatic writing, and ghostly manifestations. In 1882 a group of scientists including F. W. H. Myers, Edmund Gurney, and Henry Sidgwick formed the Society for Psychical Research (SPR).²⁷ They made various investigations

²⁷ Myers, Sidgwick, and Gurney were Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge. Sidgwick resigned his fellowship in 1869 because of religious doubts, and Myers followed out of loyalty and to pursue a career in writing and research (J. Beer 132). Joined by Gurney, investigations into psychical phenomena began around 1872 (136). Sidgwick, respected and well-connected, lent the SPR initial credibility as its first president. Gurney, a friend of George Eliot's, is considered a possible model for the eponymous Daniel Deronda in Eliot's 1876 novel (Luckhurst 43). Gurney died unexpectedly in 1889: either suicide or an accidental overdose of chloroform. William Barrett and William Crookes, both eminent physicists, were also involved in the early SPR. The calibre of the founding psychical researchers indicates the sincerity with which the society was launched; psychical research 'loomed as a very serious business to some very serious and eminent people' (Oppenheim 3).

into spirit manifestations but by the 1890s most of their activity was centred around non-physical phenomena, especially thought-transference—what became known as ‘telepathy’ and into which Myers and William Barrett carried out extensive research. Chapter Three and Chapter Seven will return to the significance of these investigations for Hodgson’s fiction, particularly the mechanism and role of telepathy in *The Night Land*.

The experiments of the SPR fell short of conclusive proof of psychic phenomena, but the concepts, and the theories proposed to explain their mechanisms, such as magnetism, passed, as mesmerism had at the start of the century, into popular circulation. As a result fantastic fiction not only contained modernised ghosts obeying natural rather than supernatural laws, but also psychic phenomena. These ranged from mesmerism and hypnosis—Poe’s ‘Mesmeric Revelation’ (1850), M. P. Shiel’s *The Purple Cloud* (1901), Richard Marsh’s ‘The Beetle’ (1897), Bulwer-Lytton’s *A Strange Story*, to telepathy—Stoker’s *Dracula*, Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Coming Race* and Hodgson’s *The Night Land*, to various scientific, or at least physical, explanations for accessing the other world—Wells’s ‘The Plattner Story’, Hodgson’s *The Ghost Pirates*, Machen’s *The Great God Pan*, Algernon Blackwood’s ‘The Willows’ (1907), and to eternally surviving souls—*Looking Backward*, *The Night Land*. As we will see, Hodgson draws inspiration from some of these earlier and contemporaneous texts, as well as directly from the spiritualist movement and the theories of the SPR.

Movements partially related to spiritualism and psychical research, such as the Theosophical Society and the occult Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, also influenced writers including Hodgson, W. B. Yeats, Blackwood, and Machen. Theosophy and occultism offered a more complex philosophical framework than spiritualism, drawing on ancient teaching and a range of religious systems; the founder of the Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky, derived many of her notions from Buddhism, Hinduism, and Egyptian theology. The diversity of cosmic and philosophical

concepts appearing in *The House on the Borderland*, for example, point to Theosophy and occultism as additional sources for some of Hodgson's ideas.

For Alex Owen, consolation for a lost faith is not enough to explain the continued interest in spiritualism, especially the later rise of occultism, such as the success of the Golden Dawn at the *fin de siècle*: 'As Victoria's reign drew to a close, many looked to a reformulated spirituality as a vital precursor of the coming age' (*Place of Enchantment* 5). Rather than simply replacing the Christian afterlife with a naturalised spirit world, spiritualism and occultism showed that belief 'was capable of renegotiating the rationalism and even scientism of the period without sacrificing the ultimate claims to meaning that surely lie at the heart of religious experience' (11). In Hodgson's fiction, religion is entirely replaced by a 'reformulated spirituality' that engages in precisely this negotiation between rationalism and meaning. As Chapter Seven will show, *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land* make up Hodgson's two major attempts to work through this negotiation, exploring a universe of natural terrors countered by the eternal endurance of love and souls which form humanity's ultimate destiny.

Conclusion

Chapter Two has aimed to provide an overview of some of the most important literary trends, for Hodgson, of the nineteenth century: Gothic, science fiction, and utopia, borderland literatures which explore diverse and sometimes conflicting themes. It has also provided an overview of some of the key cultural concerns of the *fin de siècle* period, focussing, however, on those directly relevant to Hodgson's work: from the implications of evolutionary theory, to the reconstructive goals of physical culture and the renegotiated beliefs of spiritualism and occultism. These themes will be returned to later in the thesis during specific discussions of Hodgson's fiction, showing how they underpin and inspire his presentation of borderlands of monstrosity, spirit, and the cosmos.

The chapters that follow will show how Hodgson's cultural and literary influences combine with his imaginative range and personal philosophies and experiences to produce texts that occupy borderlands of genre and theme. Novels like *The Night Land* employ several different narrative modes that the twentieth century would later distinguish between as Gothic, horror, fantasy, science fiction: terms whose flexibility still engender critical debate. Hodgson's work appeared at a crucial time for the early development of these genres and he thus plays a part in the development of more than one modern literary tradition. At the same time, however, his fiction is firmly shaped by the ideas and preoccupations of the time in which he was writing, reflecting, the spirit of the *fin-de-siècle* age, often ambivalent in its optimism and anxieties. Hodgson's own experiences as a sailor and a body-builder also contribute to the novels and stories that the following chapters will discuss, so that his work presents a complex web of ideas derived from late nineteenth-century culture, the Gothic literary tradition, and his own life.

Chapter Three

‘The borderland of some unthought of region’: *The House on the Borderland*, *The Night Land*, spiritualism, the occult, and other worlds

Chapter Five will discuss the encounter with the other in the form of corporeal and organic monstrosity in Hodgson’s fiction. Chapters Three and Four, however, turn their attention to the encounter with the immaterial other, and to the exploration of the borderland between physicality and immateriality. The other in Hodgson’s stories is sometimes supernatural, but Hodgson, drawing on Victorian spiritualism and occultism, also presents the other as ‘beings belonging to some other state of existence’ (*Ghost Pirates* 50); these beings are other, but are still governed by natural laws, or else exist somewhere on the border between natural and supernatural, between material and immaterial. This other may be encountered in various ways, but always across some form of boundary: in liminal regions, or borderlands, such as the sea; through external gateways between our world and another world or dimension, such as ships and houses; and through the internal gateways of the human mind or body, facilitated by science or supernatural invasion.

While some of the monsters discussed in Chapter Five also carry supernatural connotations, such as exuding evil, they do so through an emphatically material bodily form. The immaterial horrors being examined in this chapter share some of the characteristics of monstrosity with organic monsters, such as evoking fear and horror, or assuming visible, even tangible, form. However, instead of having a clearly and

obviously present body, their materiality ranges from the questionable (the swine-creatures of *The House on the Borderland*, whose bodies cannot be found) to the insubstantial (the mist-forms of 'The Riven Night') to the non-existent (the entities beyond the invisible doorways in *The Night Land*). This chapter is concerned with the nature and context of these instances of the immaterial supernatural and will concentrate on those texts dealing with real, as it were, encounters with the other rather than those of Hodgson's 'supernatural explained' stories in which apparent ghosts turn out to have mundane causes, such as 'The Goddess of Death'. In Hodgson's stories monsters cease to be merely physical, and this chapter will try to address how this spiritual dimension changes the meaning of monsters and monstrosity.

The immaterial other is not necessarily a supernatural being. Nineteenth-century spiritualism and the occult revival allowed for the existence of other worlds and beings that were still construed as 'natural' and real: spiritualism 'eschewed supernatural explanation. Spiritualists explained spirit communication and phenomena by proposing a hitherto undiscovered form of rarified matter that allowed spirits to manifest on the worldly plane' (Owen *Place of Enchantment* 18). Spiritualism's credibility depended on its phenomena being permissible by natural laws, although this did not prevent other observers and participants from taking a different view.

In mid-Victorian literature about spiritualist phenomena, Richard Noakes finds 'a range of natural and supernatural explanations including evil spirits, angels, conscious acts of trickery, unconscious psychological and physiological mechanisms or hitherto unknown forces associated with the human body' (28). Spiritualism presents a picture of many possibilities, further compounded by the sometimes similar theories put forward by the Society of Psychical Research and the magical beliefs of occultist movements such as the Golden Dawn. For writers, this multiplicity of explanations adds further layers of mystery to a Gothic story: the encounter with the other often hovers somewhere between fact and imagination, on the border of reality as well as substance.

The eponymous ‘ghost pirates’ of Hodgson’s novel thus have physical characteristics such as ‘wet peery eyes’ alongside their sinister ghostliness (*Ghost Pirates* 118).

Spiritualism and occultism proposed the existence of other worlds or planes of existence. In the first volume of the spiritualist journal ‘Borderland’ (1893-1897), editor W. T. Stead expressed his confidence in the world of spirits:

If future progress is as steady and rapid as that of the last year, it will be difficult to convince anyone, when the Twentieth Century dawns, that he or she, or any sane citizen, ever seriously doubted the existence of Borderland and the inhabitants thereof. (‘Preface’)

Stead’s words convey the strength of his conviction that the future would prove both spiritualists and psychical researchers right. For Stead, ‘Borderland’ is a place, real and inhabited. Another leading journal was *Two Worlds* (1888-), whose title implies a dichotomy rather than Stead’s peripheral realm. Occultism proposed something else again: one or more astral realms, known as the ‘Astral Light’. These were ‘separate planes or order of existence which interpenetrate the world of earthly perceptions’ (Owen ‘Sorcerer and Apprentice’ 101-2). These borderlands can exist beyond and alongside the known physical world, as both a place and a boundary, depending on how closely the edges either overlap or are divided. Either the borderland must be accessed by means of a medium or other conduit actively creating a connection across the boundary line, or else the boundary is so unstable that around it a border region is created. Ultimately, the borderland is a region that is accessible by both ourselves and the other.

In *Victorian Hauntings*, Julian Wolfreys argues that the ‘identification of spectrality appears in a gap between the limits of two ontological categories. The definition escapes any positivist or constructivist logic by emerging between, and yet not as part of, two

negations: *neither, nor*' (x). He quotes from Derrida: “the question of spectres is therefore the question of life, of the limit between the living and the dead” (x). Wolfrey's identification of the spectral as an ontological gap is conceptualised literally by spiritualist phenomena. During the séance, for example, spirits would manifest themselves using matter borrowed from the medium's body: this ectoplasm, a combination of incarnate flesh and discarnate spirit, occupies this gap between the living and the dead, neither one nor the other.

Amanda Warwick has warned against the dangers of applying Derridan metaphors of haunting too literally, arguing that ‘Gothic is being used to explain itself’ and ‘actual, as far as we can call them actual, ghosts, burials, deaths and undead are confused with the metaphors of textuality, trace, echo, spectre’ (Warwick 7, 8). For Luckhurst, similarly, spectrality risks becoming ‘a generalized deconstructive lever discernible everywhere’ (‘Contemporary London Gothic’ 535). These risks apply to Hodgson, too, but it is perhaps less the metaphors of textuality that form a useful tool here than the figurative expression of spectrality as something that occurs to fill a gap. Hodgson, writing consciously about borderlands and the boundary between worlds or dimensions, uses ghosts, monsters, and other elusive borderline entities as symbols of otherness: the closer the characters come to understanding the encounter they experience, the clearer and more material, definable, and comprehensible the spectre becomes. If the spectral emerges in a gap between categories, then it describes these borderland entities, which are neither consistently material nor consistently immaterial, and which defy a neat categorisation as real or imaginary, natural or supernatural.

This chapter will look at these different aspects of the borderland in Hodgson's fiction, how it manifests itself as a realm or a boundary in its own right, and how its symbols reveal themselves in material form in our world. For spiritualists, the borderland was the realm of spirits of the dead, while the materialisation of ghosts during the séance was their corporeal manifestation in our own world. This chapter will

explore both the crossing of this boundary, and the representations of the borderland in the fiction of Hodgson and some of his contemporaries. It will consider how glimpses of the borderland through a Gothic lens are transformed from the mostly benign spiritualist world into something unspeakably terrible.

Hodgson was influenced not only by spiritualism, but also by the later movements of psychical research and occultism, both of which emerged after spiritualism's peak of popularity in the 1870s. Many factors, therefore, affect how Hodgson presents the borderland, as a ghost-world or an alternative dimension, and also how it is accessed: in some stories, parallels can be drawn with the séance; in others, with occult rituals; and in others, a naturally or supernaturally weakened boundary effects contact with the other world. The novels and stories discussed in this chapter explore the borderland between materiality and immateriality. This exploration forms part of *fin-de-siècle* efforts to reconcile spirit and matter, which some have seen as combating the perceived 'disenchantment of the world', famously articulated by Max Weber in 1917 (quoted in Owen *Place of Enchantment* 10).

In the literary Gothic, the borderland often forms a reflection of the real world, which can be seen in the double of the Recluse's house in *The House on the Borderland*, for example, the 'Other-World' of Wells's 'The Plattner Story', and the world beyond the veil in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*. In late nineteenth-century Gothic novels and stories, the borderland often becomes a source of unspeakable and hellish terrors. The glimpse into or across the borderland serves a different purpose in Gothic fiction than it usually did in the spiritualist séance and is often more akin to the Theosophist or occult view of the other world as an alternative dimension and containing potentially dangerous horrors. Hodgson, Wells, and Machen are among those who exploit the theories of spiritualism, the occult, and psychical research to present the borderland, and who explore differing representations of the other world in which the encounter with the other can take many terrible forms.

Spiritualism, psychical research, and the occult

As this chapter and the next will show, Hodgson's novels and short stories were greatly influenced by ideas derived from spiritualism, Theosophy, psychical research, and the occult, including the concept of the spirit borderland, reincarnation and the survival of the human soul after death, telepathy and the psychical evolution of humankind, and magical interplanetary journeys. The rise of spiritualism, and the accompanying trends of psychical research, Theosophy, and the occult form a complex web of cultural and historical conditions of emergence in the second half of the nineteenth century, in both America and Britain. These histories have been fully discussed by Janet Oppenheim in *The Other World* (1985), Alex Owen in *The Darkened Room* (1989) and *The Place of Enchantment* (2004), and Roger Luckhurst in *The Invention of Telepathy*, with some analyses of literature in Pamela Thurschwell's *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking* (2001) and Julia Briggs's *The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*.

Spiritualism, gathering momentum in Britain from the 1850s, proposed a spirit realm, a borderland, divided from our own world except when psychically gifted mediums were able to cross that boundary and communicate with its inhabitants.²⁸ Mediums held public and private séances demonstrating phenomena including automatic writing, playing of instruments, and the physical appearance of ghosts. These were attended by ordinary people and well-known figures of the day, from writers to scientists to the aristocracy. For many there were strong attractions: 'The spiritualist alternative unabashedly tugged at the heartstrings and addressed itself to the universal human capacity for grief' (Oppenheim 36). Spiritualism offered communication with lost loved ones, entertainment, scientific enquiry, and the possibility of salvaging the existence of an afterlife so jeopardised by Darwinian fall-out after the appearance of

²⁸ Spiritualism can trace its beginning to the rapped messages communicated through Katie and Maggie Fox (then 11 and 13 years old respectively) in 1848, in Rochester, New York, which became famous as the 'Rochester knockings' (Brandon 15).

The Origin of Species in 1859. Spiritualism, with its promise of an afterlife permissible under natural, if not fully understood, laws, offered an alternative to the decline of religious faith experienced by many Victorians in the late nineteenth century.

However, it has been argued that spiritualism, and later occultism, are more than just a response to a crisis of faith. Owen argues that while religious doubt and the search for ‘consolation or meaning in an otherwise bleakly materialistic world’ is important, it does not fully explain the subsequent interest in occultism, which she identifies as a *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon, emerging later than, and very different from, mid-century spiritualism (*Place of Enchantment* 27). For Owen, quoted earlier, the popularity of occultism reflects a renegotiation of belief in an increasingly rationalised world. Luckhurst reads the 1870s ‘less as a passage of secularization than as a confused and confusing series of engagements over the relative value of “spirit” and “matter”’ (*Invention* 12). Going back to mid nineteenth-century spiritualism, Peter Lamont identifies a ‘crisis of evidence’ in the debate around psychical phenomena, especially its asserted foundation in natural laws.

Out of this debate, psychical research developed as the science of spiritualist phenomena, and its practitioners comprised both believers and sceptics. However, as Owen points out, ‘fraud was the problem that haunted [the mediums’] world’ (*Darkened Room* 67). Touching a materialised apparition without permission was forbidden in a séance, but ‘spirit-grabbing’ resulted in the exposure of many fraudulent spirit manifestations; ‘[n]early all the major mediums of the period [1870s] were detected in fraud during the course of their careers’ (*Darkened Room* 69). These incidents complicated the investigation of phenomena but did not necessarily dampen enthusiasm or terminate a medium’s career. Mediums and believers continued to strive to demonstrate psychic phenomena unequivocally, while investigators, sceptical or otherwise, sought objective and scientific proof. The Society for Psychical Research purposed to investigate psychic phenomena on a scientific basis, with its primary focus

on mental phenomena, such as telepathy and hypnosis, avoiding the physical phenomena which had been exposed so often as fraudulent (Lamont 915).

Efforts to scienticise psychical phenomena often centred around the language and images of technology, a trend reflected in the rhetoric of telepathy in *The Night Land*, as will be seen. W. T. Stead, for example, argued that

the mind uses the body as a temporary two-legged telephone for purposes of communication at short range with other minds, but that it no more ceases to exist when the body dies than we cease to exist when we ring off the telephone. ('Telepathy: A Passing Note' 508)

His analogy imposes a false logic on telepathy on the basis of the new technology of the telephone, that if one new method of communication based on innovative physical applications can be established, so may another. However, the technological analogy indicates that it mattered greatly to believers in psychical phenomena that their theories and discoveries were seen as scientifically progressive and worthy of scientific discourse.

The over-zealous adoption of the language and science and technology was not always helpful to the cause of psychical research, however. Luckhurst suggests that 'Stead's enthusiasms blurred any division of psychical research from a general flowering of the occult' (*Invention* 148). It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the SPR struggled to sustain a respectable scientific reputation, nor was this helped by their lack of solid experimental success. 'The more [Myers] became convinced that communication from beyond the grave was a reality,' writes John Beer, 'the more he had to recognise that his desire to solve the problem for mankind generally remained unsatisfied, since the kind of universally accepted evidence that he and other members of the Society felt it essential to discover was precisely what eluded them' (186). The

ambiguity created by this lack of valid evidence to support nonetheless strong convictions placed psychological phenomena somewhere between belief and credibility, neither proved nor disproved.

Peter Lamont argues that for the Victorians, the issue of the validity of psychological phenomena was not so clear cut as it can appear now: 'while historians might be able to dismiss [contemporary accounts] as inherently unreliable, this was somewhat more difficult for the Victorians. ...witnesses included individuals of unquestionable intellect and social status whose testimony demanded to be taken seriously' (898). The question is not whether phenomena were real but the effect that their sometimes widespread acceptance could have on Victorian culture more generally. However, the struggle of sceptics to provide convincing explanations of the phenomena of such celebrated mediums as Daniel Dunglas Home led to what Lamont terms a 'crisis of evidence', with psychological phenomena posing a serious threat to orthodox science (901). The position of these phenomena on borderlines of evidence and natural laws provided writers like Hodgson with a validating framework for stories relying on ghostly mystery for their effect.

The séance itself occupied a borderline position. The séance room, with its dim lighting, mysterious ambience, and enigmatic (for some) phenomena, is closed off, for a time, from the rest of the world. It represents a space between this world and the 'other' world, but also between truths. As the explanations identified by Noakes show (quoted earlier), the accounts of séances by believers, sceptics, and reportedly objective researchers reveal a lack of consensus about what actually happened during a séance. This picture is further confused by the conflicting reputations of different mediums: some were openly caught in trickery, while others, like Daniel Dunglas Home, never had their phenomena satisfactorily explained by disbelievers. This uncertainty renders the séance shadowy and unstable, itself occupying a gap between real and unreal.

The problem of the séance, as Elana Gomel argues, is not that nothing happened in it, but that the spiritualist explanation of what happened conflicted with known physical laws. For Gomel, spiritualism was fatally underscored by ‘a schism within its own defining concepts ... in the oxymoronic view of materiality, expressed in the movement’s defining trope of “natural supernatural”’ (191). Both truths, natural and supernatural, cannot be simultaneously maintained; spiritualism is a paradox which promises ‘an impossible unity’ of physical and spiritual worldviews (Gomel 192). Spiritualism’s internal schism positions it in a gap ‘on the unstable boundary between body and psyche’ (Gomel 194). In this rhetoric, a gap and a boundary come to have similar meanings: the area between, the borderland. Gothic stories adopt this uncertain positioning as a way of maintaining ambivalence between the real and the fantastic.

Todorov, in *The Fantastic*, argues that

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know... there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world.

The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place. (25)

This describes both the uncertainty of the séance and that sense of disbelief common to both ghost stories and the Gothic. The difference between fiction before and after the advent of spiritualism is that later writers have a new framework on which to draw, a modern discourse casting a sustainable uncertainty over apparently supernatural events: suggesting laws of nature of which the hesitating person is not aware. Algernon Blackwood’s psychic doctor, John Silence, specialising in cases such as demonic possession, apparitions, witchcraft, and fire elementals, observes that he has ‘yet to

come across a problem that is not natural and has not a natural explanation. It's merely a question of how much one knows—and admits ('Nemesis of Fire' [1908] 173). Here and elsewhere ('The Willows', for example) Blackwood's stories push knowledge of the world beyond its known bounds. Lamont goes on to argue that 'mystery and magic were fought against because they made the world more ambivalent, less certain, less orderly' (904). Gothic and ghost stories operate a return to a less orderly world in which these gaps and questions of fact and imagination can be explored and exploited.

By the time Hodgson was writing, psychical phenomena had already infiltrated Victorian literature. Examples include thought-reading and premonition in George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" (1859), and the mesmeric beliefs of Dr. Lloyd in Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story*. Julia Briggs credits Dr. Lloyd as 'the first mesmeric doctor in English literature, though ... he had several notable forebears in life' (59). Hodgson's occult detective Thomas Carnacki follows in the footsteps of Dr. Lloyd, John Silence, and Sheridan Le Fanu's Dr. Hesselius. Many writers of supernatural fiction, including Le Fanu and Blackwood, but also M. R. James, Marsh, and Machen, drew inspiration from the novelty of the Victorian enthusiasm for spiritualism and psychical research in the late nineteenth century.

Luckhurst points out that 'many authors associated with the fin-de-siècle Gothic ... produced texts saturated with possibilities lifted from psychical research' (*Invention* 185). Ghosts and spectres, of course, had always been present in popular fiction, but the debates engendered by psychical research in the modern age refreshed this traditional theme:

The ghosts, phantasms, and spirits of various kinds that feature so prominently in the fiction of the period were far older phenomena than even spies and undercover agents: they, however, also seemed new. As one

commentator noted in 1900: 'The old spectre of our childhood with his clanking chains has faded into nothingness in this age of inquiry. If he appears again it is in a new character and he must at least be civil to the Society for Psychological Research'. (Keating 360)

In the 'age of inquiry', it seemed, ghostly communication was no longer confined to the pages of novels or the imaginations of Gothic heroines, but was being conducted, believed, and debated in the 'real' world, even by real scientists. 'There can be little doubt,' Keating concludes, 'that the new sophistication of the ghost story owed a considerable debt to the SPR' (362). The SPR provided both inspiration and verification for the authors of supernatural fiction. In this way, spiritualist- and psychical research-inspired fiction was lent a veil of credibility once granted to the Gothic novel by the appearance of antiquity and authenticity.

Briggs observes that the forces invoked by spiritualists and psychical researchers were

substantially different from those traditional and primitive powers that still survived in isolated rural areas. ... These local ghosts had belonged to an older world and had conformed to certain ancient patterns of belief, whereas the new ghosts were essentially urban products, possessing little *raison d'être* beyond the mere ability to communicate. They were invoked primarily in order that their messages might prove the existence of the spirit world. (Briggs 52)

The spirits and other phenomena of the nineteenth century are, then, distinctly modern in character, explained using language and analogies derived from new science and technologies, functioning in a circular fashion of existing to prove that they existed, and

put forward as the answer to a range of questions raised by the progress of the nineteenth century. In Hodgson's fiction, as we will see, ghosts and other phenomena are presented in a dual, borderland context, brought out of a Gothic past of legend and superstition into a modernity of natural forces and scientific explanation.

Hodgson and spiritualism

Hodgson does not seem to have been a practising spiritualist, but several circumstances, other than those evident in his fiction, link him to an interest in spiritual and psychical ideas. Spiritualism was not a fad limited to London: outside the capital its strongest provincial followings were found in the north of England, including Lancashire, where Hodgson lived. The Spiritualists' National Federation, founded in 1891, had its headquarters in Manchester, and Oppenheim lists several spiritualist magazines and societies in Yorkshire and Lancashire active between the 1850s and the 1890s (91). The popularity of spiritualism in the north of England would have ensured Hodgson's awareness of its central ideas, although there is no evidence to suggest that he attended séances. Hodgson was also keenly interested in physical culture and health food, adopting a lifestyle based on principles that had strong links with the spiritualist movement. Owen notes:

Vegetarianism and the campaign against vaccination had long been popular platforms within radical and provincial spiritualist circles, and food reform, a 'natural' or holistic approach to health care, and humanitarian causes of all kinds were seen as integral aspects of the social regeneration to which the 'mystically' inclined and many socialists were committed. (*Place of Enchantment* 25-6)

Hodgson may well have been drawn to the spiritualist movement through a shared philosophy of lifestyle. These three factors—bodily health, social health, and the phenomena and forces associated with spiritualism—come together in the society of the Great Redoubt in *The Night Land*, as we will see in Chapter Seven.

The theories and investigations of the Society for Psychical Research would also have been available to Hodgson. Stephanie Moss, arguing the same case for Bram Stoker prior to the publication of *Dracula*, points out that the views of the SPR ‘were made known to the public through letters in the *Times*, articles in the *Nineteenth Century Review*, *National Review*, and *Contemporary Review*, [and] the Society’s *Proceedings* that were issued in volumes beginning July 1882’ (Moss 88). From these and other public sources, information on psychic phenomena would have been readily accessible to Hodgson.

Hodgson seems to have been interested in spiritualism and the occult for their own sake, as well as for creative inspiration. Everts’s accounts of Hodgson’s reading habits and the anecdotes of psychic experiences, discussed in Chapter One, suggest Hodgson had a genuine interest, if not wholehearted belief, in spiritual phenomena. The subjects of his fiction form further evidence, containing instances of hypnosis (electrically-induced, in ‘A Timely Escape’), telepathy (*Night Land*), ghosts (‘The Riven Night’ and ‘The Inhabitants of Middle Islet’), and the survival of human souls after death (*The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land*), as well as the occult mechanisms of the ‘Carnacki’ stories.

The creative potential latent in spiritualist beliefs and the theories of the Society for Psychical Research evidently appealed strongly to Hodgson’s imagination. His fiction frequently deals with supernatural forces from another world, spiritual immortality, and psychic abilities, addressing questions of dimensional boundaries and human spiritual limits. Theosophy and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn also play a part in influencing Hodgson’s ideas. Oppenheim argues that ‘[i]n theory, spiritualists and

psychical researchers rejected the secretive and ritualistic elements of the occult tradition, proclaiming instead their absolute devotion to the standards of open, rational, empirical enquiry set forth by modern science', but in practice they had affinities and many spiritualists were also drawn to occultism (159).

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, and taught an esoteric philosophy of Karma and reincarnation, loosely based on Buddhism; Arthur Conan Doyle credits Blavatsky with 'resuscitating the ancient wisdom of the East and forming it, under the name of Theosophy, into a philosophic system which would be intelligible to and acceptable by the West' (*History of Spiritualism* Vol. 2 64). Theosophy attracted a lot of existing spiritualists although it tended more strongly towards the occult. Theosophists believed that the human spirit survived beyond death, but did not linger in the spirit world accessed by the séance. The astral plane was 'intertwined with the plane of daily life' and occupied by mischievous and non-human spirits with which it was dangerous to communicate (Oppenheim 165). The human soul instead underwent a succession of reincarnations, for hundreds or thousands of years if that was necessary for the soul to fulfil its fate (169). Hodgson adopts both these ideas of malicious spirits and reincarnation of human souls, particularly in *The Night Land*.

The Golden Dawn was a secret, magical order, established (officially, at least) in 1888, which drew on ancient and esoteric texts and doctrines to produce 'an elaborate system of occult education and training' (J. W. Brodie-Innes, quoted in Gilbert 63). The Order's most notorious member was Aleister Crowley, but its members also included Yeats, Blackwood, and Machen, whose writing is clearly inflected with occult and magical themes.²⁹ Once in the Order, 'Victorian initiates were versed in a reworked version of Renaissance Hermeticism preoccupied with alchemy, concerned to unlock

²⁹ See Owen, 'The Sorcerer and his Apprentice' for a full discussion of Crowley, who eventually left the Golden Dawn to form his own order, the Silver Star.
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the invisible forces of nature, and inviting its adherents to unlock the secrets of the universe' (Owen *Place of Enchantment* 4). This often involved ritual magic, which, amongst other things, allowed practitioners to travel through astral realms in search of these answers—an experience reflected in the mystical journeys of the Recluse in *The House on the Borderland*.

Occultism, Owen argues, 'played on a Victorian triumphalist notion of progress while allaying fears that advances in knowledge and understanding might result in the desecration of a mysterious and wonderful universe' ('Sorcerer and Apprentice' 101). Like spiritualism and psychic phenomena, the occult was positioned on the borderland between known and unknown, answering a need for deeper mysteries in the world in a context not (yet) undermined by science. The occult also responded to a wider interest in different cultures and philosophy that underpins the eclectic range of ideas emerging in Hodgson's work. Occultism

spoke to a new taste for philosophical idealism and European vitalism but at the same time owed much to late-Victorian scholarship and the opening of new fields of academic enquiry. Folklore, anthropology, Egyptology, philology, and the study of comparative religion each had their place in a 'mysticism' that looked East as well as West. (Owen *Place of Enchantment* 28)

Hodgson's work, published from 1904 onwards, must be read in the context of this later occult revival as well as the continuing spiritualist movement out of which it developed.

Luckhurst argues that in Hodgson's 'Carnacki' stories, 'Carnacki's protective pentacle, his conjuring of malicious forces, and his references to the authority of medieval manuscripts owe more to the rites associated with the Order of the Golden

Dawn than psychical research' (*Invention* 189). Darryl Jones calls *The House on the Borderland*

a compendium of occult and spiritualist themes and ideas, from the two-worlds hypothesis and astral journeys of the spiritualists, to the Theosophical 'Esoteric Buddhism' of Madame Blavatsky and Alfred Percy Sinnet, to the Occult Celtism of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

(12)

These comments acknowledge the range of sources on which Hodgson was drawing in the 1900s and point to the diversity of ideas in his writing. Hodgson's most complex works present a challenging web of themes: ideas derived from these not entirely homogenous sources are often woven through the same piece of writing. *The House on the Borderland*, for example, tells the story of a man whose house is invaded by apparently supernatural swine-creatures; it offers a nightmarish reflection of his house in another dimension and includes accounts of episodic visions of journeys through time and the solar system and of the reunion of human souls; it invites, as Amanda Boulter discusses, alternative readings of madness and hallucination, psychoanalysis and sexual anxiety. In *The Night Land*, Hodgson returns to the Theosophist notion of the immortality of human souls through aeons of time, attributed to the strength of eternal love, but also draws on explanations of telepathy from the Society for Psychical Research, and applies these to evolutionary and eschatological theory over the immense timescale of his novel. *The Night Land*, in particular, seems to seek a resolution to the schism between modern spirituality and materialism by unifying diverse strands of thought.

By extrapolating from contemporaneous debates around telepathy, communication from beyond the grave, two worlds, and the possibility for other states of existence,

Hodgson's novels and stories destabilise the boundaries normally associated with the limits of a human life, the interaction between individuals, and the boundaries of the material world. In the next section we will see how unstable borderlands are used to explore the cross-over between different states of existence, through the Gothic encounter with the other in *The House on the Borderland*, 'The Baumoff Explosive', and *The Night Land*.

Shadow worlds and borderland reflections

The borderland figures either as the place on the other side, the land that borders, or it is a place *on* the border, between our world and the other world, a place which both ourselves and the other can access. The séance and the occult ritual serve the same purpose: creating a set of conditions allowing the spiritual or magical world to be reached. Writers of ghost stories, which depend for their plots on the encounter with the other, also need to set up a mechanism for effecting this encounter, of allowing access to the borderland. Many of Hodgson's stories contain some doorway or set of circumstances that allow this to happen, and there are comparable situations in Wells's 'The Plattner Story' and Machen's *The Great God Pan* that offer alternative, and sometimes similar, glimpses of what might lie beyond.

'Gaps in the world-hedge'

Rather than being simply a line to be crossed, the borderland is also a place where one can go, in which the actual position of the boundary cannot always be pinpointed. In the séance, we might describe the entranced medium as the means of crossing this boundary, which becomes visible and locatable as soon as things start to cross it. Gomel observes that the medium is meant to be 'a neutral, transparent conduit between the two worlds' but that, in the words of Conan Doyle, the 'stained glass will still tint the light which passes through it, and our human organism will never be crystal clear' (quoted in © Emily Alder 2009

Gomel 192). The medium's traces are left on whatever she produces: automatic writing, spirit manifestations.³⁰ The object or mechanism used by Gothic stories to breach the boundary sometimes influences the representation of the borderland or the spirit from it: thus in Hodgson's first 'Carnacki' story, 'The Gateway of the Monster', an ancient ring is sought by a giant ghostly hand; in 'The Plattner Story' the green powder that explodes to knock Plattner into another dimension inflects it (perhaps) with its 'differentiating greenish colour' ('Plattner Story' 149); and the spectral forms invading the *Mortzestus* in *The Ghost Pirates* take the shape of men and sailing ships.

Gothic fiction rarely, if at all, transposes the séance directly into its narratives.³¹ But the role of the medium is taken up by other characters in other contexts: the patient upon whom the scientist experiments, the scientist who experiments on himself. In *The Great God Pan*, through Dr. Raymond's experiment Mary becomes the conduit to an unseen world, and what passes into our world is shaped by both her and 'Pan': her daughter Helen. In Hodgson's 'The Baumoff Explosive', the scientist Baumoff takes the place of the medium, following an alchemic ritual and entering a trance in an effort to re-enact the Darkening of Christ's crucifixion. The 'Christ-apeing monster of the void', which (apparently) possesses and kills Baumoff before departing, leaves its traces on the dead man's features: 'His face was enormously swollen, and there was, somehow, something *beastly* about him. ... I shall always remember how he looked. He was leering, like a human-beast, more than a man' ('Baumoff Explosive' 218).³² If the human adopts traces of the other, so the other, in these stories, also adopts something of the human, which is both horribly distorted and dreadfully recognisable. Dr. Raymond realises that 'human flesh may become the veil of a horror one dare not express' (Machen *Pan* 50).

³⁰ Victorian mediums were predominately women, who were seen as having a particular spiritual authority (Owen *Darkened Room* 5-6).

³¹ One example is Arthur Conan Doyle's 'Playing with Fire' in which an aggressive beast materialises instead of a human spirit.

³² 'The Baumoff Explosive' appeared in *Nash's Magazine* (1919) and later in *Out of the Storm* as 'Eloi Eloi Lama Sabachthani', Hodgson's original, unpublished title.

The spirit-flesh manifestation of the séance becomes an unspeakable horror in the hands of Gothic writers, a terrible double. As the medium is subjugated to the characteristics of whatever she channels, so is humanity suppressed by bodily possession by a demonic spirit.

Human mediums like Mary and Baumoff form one sort of conduit between two worlds. Another sort of conduit may be represented as a physical object or structure. For Darryl Jones, the schism between the scientific and the spiritual is reconciled in the *omphalos*, the ‘divine navel’, which acts as ‘a geomantic centre point, locus of the convergence of occult forces, a singularity of spiritual creation or force’ (1). He identifies the *omphalos* in the ancient forts and Celtic temples of Arthur Machen, and in the Pit over which the house of *The House on the Borderland* is built: this chasm is ‘another geomantic *omphalos*, the borderland between two worlds’ (D. Jones 12). From this Pit emerge the supernatural swine-creatures that attack the Recluse’s house.

The house itself is an extension of this *omphalos*, a haunted house that brings the Recluse into contact with both demonic and transcendental forces. The house is supposedly built by the devil, and the abominable swine-creatures come from ‘some unholy place in the bowels of the world’ (*House* 150). The Recluse reports hearing an ‘old story, told amongst the country people, to the effect that the devil built the place’ (117), and, to the villagers, the house is ‘a synonym of all that is unholy and dreadful’ (201). Some occult significance may be attached to ‘the quaintness of the structure, which is curious and fantastic to the last degree. Little curved towers and pinnacles, with outlines suggestive of leaping flames, predominate; while the body of the building is in the form of a circle’ (117). The house’s shape is suggestive of the symbols drawn during occultist rituals, while the ‘leaping flames’ carry obvious hellish connotations.

The invading swine-creatures can be understood as products of the Recluse’s madness or imagination, or, as Jones and Amanda Boulter have argued, that he has been shooting at Irish peasants. However, they can also be understood as products of primal,

devilish, occult evil, in a similar vein to some of Machen's stories such as 'The Shining Pyramid' (1895), in which symbols and legends surrounding a specific location indicate devilish horrors due to take place. In *The Ghost Pirates*, the *Mortzestus* also has a reputation for being unlucky, and the crew 'spoke of her as if it were an accepted fact that she was haunted' (*Ghost Pirates* 10). Both house and ship have a bad reputation; they are unwanted spaces and it is through entering their structures that the characters encounter things from the other world.

The house in the arena, to which the Recluse travels in his visionary journeys, is a reflection, or a double, of his own: 'in no particular, save in colour and its enormous size, did the lonely structure vary from this house in which I live' (*House* 121). In this first vision, he sees a 'foul Swine-creature' peering in the windows, 'searching for an ingress into the House'. Later, once he has returned, he battles the swine-creatures around the real house, or at least that aspect of it that is still (mostly) in the real world. He again sees them from the other side of the boundary during his final journey through time: 'over its walls crawled a legion of unholy things, almost covering the old building... they were the Swine-creatures' (180). These views of the swine-creatures from the other side of the boundary identify the pit and the house as the links between dimensions.

The Recluse's closest inspection of the house in the arena reveals that it is identical down to a door 'broken partly from its hinges, precisely in the manner that my study door had been force inwards'. His theory is that 'in some unexplainable manner this house, in which I live, was *en rapport*—to use a recognised term—with that other tremendous structure away in the midst of that incomparable Plain' (189). The Recluse's choice of the 'recognised term', *en rapport*, indicates a familiarity with *fin-de-siècle* theories of psychical connection. Alternatively, the two houses might be read as the same house, viewed from different dimensions, or existing in different dimensions but overlapping, just as occultists believed the astral realms overlapped with

our own world. This is finally confirmed when, in the last stages of the story (or his madness), the Recluse actually sees the ‘Thing from the arena’ looking in at the window (195).

Hodgson uses the idea of a structure forming a gateway in many ways. In ‘The Gateway of the Monster’, the portal is the ancient ring, ‘a doorway ... A sort of gap in the world-hedge’ through which the evil force comes ‘pouring into the material world, as gas might pour out from the mouth of a pipe’ (10). The doorway allows the immaterial to take material form in our world. In other stories the portal is less tangible; in ‘The Baumoff Explosive’, it is Baumoff’s use of a drug and his imitation of the conditions of Christ’s crucifixion that opens up his brain to the other world for demonic possession. In the strange visions experienced by the Recluse in *The House on the Borderland* it is something about the house that allows him to pass into the borderland, and in *The Ghost Pirates*, as we will see in Chapter Four, it is something about the ship. In *The Night Land*, the strength of the barrier between dimensions seems to have generally and permanently thinned; X is under threat from strange forces almost anywhere in the Land:

A dim record there was of olden sciences... which, disturbing the unmeasurable Outward Powers, had allowed to pass the Barrier of Life some of those Monsters and Ab-human creatures, which are so wondrously cushioned from us at this normal present. (44)

Monsters have been able to cross into the world through a barrier breached by the inadvisable investigations of science. However, the Night Land can be seen as a borderland itself, which both humans and the monsters have accessed.

One of the most often recurring images of the crossing of the boundary between worlds, and not only in Hodgson, is mist.³³ Mistiness is perhaps the classic symbol of the soft and permeable boundary between two worlds, as one fades into the other. Alice, climbing through the looking-glass, says “Let’s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it’s turning into a sort of mist now, I declare!” ... And certainly the glass *was* beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist’ (Carroll *Through the Looking Glass* 220). Mist, like gauze or a veil, both conceals and allows passage (of a sort) through itself. Discussing mirror images (including *Alice*) in children’s fantasy literature, Marina Warner remarks that ‘Passing through to the other side of the material world means passing into something special, enchanted, illusory, sometimes alarming, always intensely vivid’ (Warner 208). The same may be said of the Gothic, except that the reflected world is twisted and distorted in a terrible way, darkly.

In Hodgson’s fiction, mist often heralds a change in states of reality. In *The Ghost Pirates* mist creates a ‘subtle atmosphere’ around the ship, a shifting borderland of overlapping dimensions (59). In *The House of the Borderland*, just before one of his dream visions, the Recluse observes ‘a misty look about the room, giving a curious softness to each table and chair furnishing. ... I could still see each piece of furniture; but in a strangely unreal way, more as though the ghost of each table and chair had taken the place of the solid article’ (160). Finally they ‘resolved into nothingness’ along with the walls, and the Recluse finds himself on ‘the shore of an immense and silent sea’: the ‘Sea of Sleep’, where he has a desperate encounter with the soul of his lost

³³ In *fin-de-siècle* fiction, mist often symbolises secrecy, mystery, and the suggestion of the unreal. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, the funereal imagery of Utterson’s journey through London fog indicates the mystery around Hyde and Carew’s murder: the ‘first fog of the season’ is a ‘chocolate-coloured pall’ blown into ‘swirling wreaths’ (Stevenson 23). In Doyle’s ‘The Hound of the Baskervilles’, rain and cloud clothe the moor in sinister ambiguity and turn Watson’s glimpse of the hound into a hellish vision leaping from a ‘wall of fog’: ‘Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame’ (354).

love. This experience suggest two layers to the Recluse's visions, or journeys: on the one level he is briefly reunited with his beloved in the spirit realm, while on the other he experiences a journey through time as well as a terrible Gothic reflection of his house on the other side. Occultists vouched for not just one realm, but many, and the Recluse's vision reflects a journey through, perhaps, many dimensions, both adjoining and overlapping with our own, as the presence of the swine-creatures on both sides of the boundary suggests.

Wells's 'The Plattner Story' similarly uses mist to characterise such a boundary, and also explores or represents what might, in spiritualist discourse, be on the other side. Gottfried Plattner is accidentally transported to a shadowy invisible world by the explosion of an unknown powder during a chemistry detention at the school where he works. Like Dr. Jekyll's salt or the drug from Machen's 'The Novel of the White Powder' in *The Three Impostors* (1895), no-one knows where it came from; the experiment is thus a mystery and cannot be repeated.

'The Plattner Story' is presented as 'a pretty question in the value of evidence', and the evidence is not unlike that presented for a séance: indubitable facts, reliable witnesses, but a very peculiar core. After the adventure, Plattner's heart now beats on the right side of his chest, his lungs are 'contraposed', and his right hand has become his left ('The Plattner Story' 142). The only photograph which matches his current, slightly asymmetrical face is 'one of those cheap "Gem" photographs that were then in vogue, taken direct upon metal, and therefore reversing things just as a looking-glass would' (142). Plattner has become a reflection of his former self. Since this is impossible under normal rules of physics, the narrator suggests that 'the curious inversion of Plattner's left and right sides is proof that he has moved out of our space into what is called the Fourth Dimension, and that he has returned again to our world' (143). Plattner's passage through another dimension, apparently, reversed his bodily structure, and Wells structures the story so that the assemblage of 'evidence' by an avowedly sceptical

narrator in fact lends strength to the explanation. The narrator distinguishes carefully between ascertainable evidence and Plattner's first-hand account, for which

we have only Mr. Gottfried Plattner's word. I do not wish to discredit that, but I must point out—what so many writers on obscure psychic phenomena fail to do—that we are passing here from the practically undeniable to that kind of matter which any reasonable man is entitled to believe or reject as he thinks proper. (148)

In this way the narrator both distances the story from common accounts of psychic phenomena by this dig at the credulous or misleading habits of other writers, and passes responsibility for belief over to the reader.

The Other-World is ghostly: 'dim, uncertain, grey shapes stood in the place' of the furniture, and two pupils walk through Plattner 'with no more force than a wisp of mist' (149). He is in a place of greenish darkness against which 'the furniture and occupants of the classroom, it seems, stood out like phosphorescent spectres, faint and impalpable' (149). This borderland appears to occupy the same space as our world; a reflection of our world is visible to Plattner when the borderland is dark, but he is unable to touch or communicate with anyone in either world. Yet he appears in people's dreams: the normal mechanism of dreams is reversed as Plattner apparently accesses them from the other side. The Other-World is either, as mesmerists would suggest, accessible by the unconscious, or is part of people's unconscious; everyone is in our world followed by 'drifting heads... helpless disembodiments' in the other world, which are perhaps souls of the dead keeping watch on the living (153). Possibly the visibility of the world in the dark is Wells's little joke on the illusions only visible in the dim light of the séance, but it also portrays the other world as a world of shadows, as Plattner's appearance in dreams suggests it is the world of dreams.

‘The Plattner Story’ purposely leaves questions unanswered. The exact nature and function of the Watchers of the Living are not determined, nor

if they are indeed the Dead, why they should so closely and passionately watch a world they have left for ever. It may be ... [that] we may still have to witness the working out of the train of consequences we have laid. If human souls continue after death, then surely human interests continue after death. (154)

Despite the narrator’s stated scepticism, Wells allows him to speculate on a context for the story that draws directly on one of the central questions of psychical research: the continuation of human personality after death. The answers offered by ‘The Plattner Story’ would, if they were true, no doubt disappoint the Recluse or spiritualists who yearned for a positive reunion with their loved ones. But Wells’s morbid borderland souls with their ‘expression of distress and anguish’ and ‘faint sounds of wretchedness’ hint more subtly at what Hodgson and Machen take to terrible extremes: the unspeakable horrors that could lie in the beyond (152).

‘The world beyond the shadows’

In *The Great God Pan*, Dr. Raymond describes two worlds to Clarke, shortly before his experiment on Mary:

You see me standing here beside you, and hear my voice; but I tell you that all these things ... 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. ... it may be strange, but it is

true, and the ancients knew what lifting the veil means. They called it seeing the god Pan. (*Pan 2*)

For Raymond, the other world is the 'real' world. The narrator of 'The Plattner Story' terms the two 'our world' and the 'Other-World'; both are equally real when one is in it while the other is equally shadowy. The representation of the borderland as a shadow-realm indicates both its opaque and elusive nature, like shadows, and its function as a doubling of ourselves or our own world.

Wolfreys argues that the

'architecture' of every form, everything we understand as 'reality', whether it be that of the house, the town, the novel, subjectivity or being, is traced by a double, an incorporeal phantom or phantasm, or a 'gap' to use Nicolas Abraham's word, within the structures we mistakenly believe to be unities, complete, whole, and undifferentiated. (6)

In these terms familiar forms seem stable and trustworthy, but conceal a shadowy alterity. The spectral reality, then, is both gap and phantasmic double, literalised in these texts in the borderland, which occupies the gap between two worlds and reflects them both.

The borderland shows a reflection in a glass, darkly, as in the often-quoted lines from 1 Corinthians: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known' (1 Corinthians 13:12, King James Bible).³⁴ 'Through a glass' refers to looking in a mirror rather than through a lens; in other translations 'glass' sometimes becomes 'mirror', and 'darkly' becomes

³⁴ The phrase 'a glass darkly' was used by Sheridan Le Fanu as the title for a collection of short stories, *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) and is also adopted elsewhere, such as for the title of Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* (1977).

'dimly' or 'puzzling'. In this world 'reality' is always puzzling or distorted; we only 'know in part', but a mutual clarity of knowledge, 'face to face ... then shall I know even as I am known' is promised. This knowledge is suggested as something desirable, something to be looked forward to, but in the Gothic, in the hands of Stevenson, Machen, and Hodgson, for example, this promise is darkly distorted. The reality in the mirror is unspeakably terrible and those who reach it suffer usually indescribable horrors.

Dr. Raymond realises that the veil he thought concealed the 'real world', the 'world beyond the shadows', in fact conceals formless horror from which the 'shadows' protect us. Dr. Raymond 'dare not' express this horror; Dr. Matheson, who witnesses Helen's death, 'will not' describe it: 'I watched, and at last I saw nothing but a substance as jelly. Then the ladder was ascended again ... [here the MS is illegible]... for one instant I saw a Form, shaped in dimness before me, which I will not further describe' (*Pan* 47). In a sequence closely concerned with the evolutionary scale and evolutionary reversion, it is notable that the worst form is not the 'jelly' at the bottom of the scale, but something on the way up, perhaps even at the top—or somehow beyond it, beyond understanding. The dim form is again on the edge of perception, 'shaped in dimness', shadowy. The illegibility of the manuscript is significant; the paper and ink refuse to accept the words, the words refuse to be written legibly, or the presumably shaking hand of Dr. Matheson refuses to write clearly, much as Clarke, significantly, closes his book of 'Memoirs to Prove the Existence of the Devil' just as the girl Rachel is about to reveal something important about Helen (13). The true horrors of the borderland resist direct representation.

As Clarke waits for Raymond to prepare his experiment on Mary, he is affected by the smell in the laboratory and starts to dream: 'It was a burning day at the beginning of August, the heat had dimmed the outlines of all things and all distances with a faint mist' (5). Mist signals the weakening of the boundary between two worlds, and 'for a

moment of time he stood face to face there with a presence, that was neither man nor beast, neither the living nor the dead, but all things mingled, the form of all things but devoid of a form' (6). This 'face to face' glimpse is not an epiphany of grace but of horror, something humans are not meant to see.

In *The Night Land*, the mist forms of the 'Silent Ones' suggest a glimpse of the borderland beyond the weakened 'Barrier of Life'. X speculates that they might be 'the visible shape of some of those many Forces that were abroad in the Night Land': elemental beings from another plane (*Night Land* 181). Elementals, according to Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical doctrine, are astral forms that live in and can manipulate the ether. They can make 'tangible bodies', but usually 'the most solid of their bodies is ordinarily just immaterial enough to escape perception by our physical eyesight, but not so unsubstantial but that they can be perfectly recognised by the inner, or clairvoyant vision' (*Isis Unveiled* 311). The narrator of *The Night Land*, with his unusual psychic gifts, explains that he 'would think sometimes to perceive the shapes of the Silent Ones stood vague and watchful; yet, on the instant, to see nothing' (158). The Silent Ones hover on the boundary of physical and psychical perception, 'as that a thing of Strange Life were half shown to my human eyes' (181). Similarly, their appropriation of a real and human-made structure, the aptly-named Road Where The Silent Ones Walk, suggests an ambiguous materiality, too.

Silence, in *The Night Land*, equates closely with death and the possibility of access to borderland realms. The spirit of the mesmerised subject, Blavatsky claims, 'quits its paralyzed earthly casket', and

the gates of the portal which marks the entrance to the 'silent land' are now but partially ajar; they will fly wide open before the soul of the entranced somnambulist only on that day when, united with its higher immortal essence, it will have quitted forever its mortal frame. (*Isis Unveiled* 159)

The clairvoyant's spirit can obtain a glimpse of the 'silent land' through a 'chink', but only the souls of the dead may enter. In *The Night Land*, the lowest level of the pyramid, in which the civilisation's dead are disposed of in the 'Crack' of the Earth-Current, is known as the 'Country of Silence', sometimes the 'Garden of Silence' (*Night Land* 100-1). It is not a place of grief, but a place of peace and memories, a hallowed region that leaves the visitor 'purified and sweetened of soul and mind' (101). However, in contrast to this 'holy' place, the Night Land outside contains a 'Quiet City' and a 'House of Silence'. The House of Silence is a deadly place, exuding the 'quiet threat that lived silent there within', threatening the souls of those who enter, or come too close (192). Here silence signifies terrible destruction instead of a peaceful afterlife.

On the return journey from the Lesser Redoubt, Naani is attacked, seemingly killed, by the House of Silence and is revived later by the power of the Earth-Current inside the safety of the Great Redoubt. While security is found within the alien structure of the metal pyramid, the House of Silence, conversely, resembles the domestic haven of a home, complete with doors and windows: 'the great, uncased windows gave out the silence and the light – aye, the utter silence of an unholy desolation' (111). As the malevolent double of X's angular home, the House of Silence is, perhaps, lit by a corrupt version of the Earth-Current, and rather than purifying souls, it consumes them.

The doorway of the House of Silence, then, can be read as the gate of a portal, a conduit to utter destruction rather than a union with one's 'higher immortal essence'. Moreover, although this time accompanied by a 'Sound', other similar gates exist:

of those that came alive unto the Pyramid, they had all one strange tale to tell, how that there were secret and horrid Doorways In The Night. Yet how this thing could be plain to them, who may know truly; save it be that the eyes of their spirits did behold that which was hid to the eyes of the

flesh. And there was afterward writ a proper and careful treatise, and did set out that there did be ruptures of the Æther, the which did constitute doorways. (167)

In *The Night Land*, such gateways constitute ‘ruptures of the Æther’ rather than supernatural mysteries: a deliberate attempt to scienticise psychic phenomena, in line with the approach of spiritualism and Theosophy. The narrator is at pains to explain that an encounter with one of these forces does not simply mean physical death: ‘the Records did make always that they had come upon Destruction, and not simply unto Death; but were destroyed by a strange and Invisible Evil Power from the Night’ (167). As an ambiguous force, both physical and immaterial, it has the capability to destroy a human’s spirit as well as body, as Chapter Seven will discuss further.

These doorways offer a glimpse of the other side, of the world beyond the borderland, but it is an invisible glimpse, revealing nothing except an unrepresentable destruction. In *The Great God Pan*, Villiers explains to Austin that

those who are wise know that all symbols are symbols of something, not of nothing. ...you and I, at all events, have known something of the terror that may dwell in the secret place of life, manifested under human flesh; that which is without form taking to itself a form. (43)

Humans deal with such ‘secret’ terrors through comprehensible symbols: woman’s shape like Helen, or shadowy forms like the Silent Ones, refractions of the world beyond the veil rendered into more familiar registers of human experience. It is when ‘that which is without form’ is exposed in its formlessness that horror becomes overwhelming, as when Dr. Matheson, for example, is unable to describe Helen’s death fully.

X's 'ruptures in the Æther' express a truly formless terror. Through the invisible doorways, X sees nothing materially, but is conscious of the existence of another place:

a door... opened upward there; for the noise did grow in such a wise as you shall hear a distant sound come through... but this sound, though it did come *through* there, was as that it did come outward from some far lost and foreign Eternity. (*Night Land* 170)

X experiences this phenomenon in terms of distance, disorientation, and unfamiliarity; the sound is from somewhere 'far lost and foreign', and earlier 'out of a Foreign Place' (166). These qualities also characterise X's experience of the Night Land on his long and often blind search through a darkened landscape:

you shall know me truly wrapped about with such a night as did seem to press upon my very soul... so that I did seem lost even from my self, and did appear as that I went presently in unreal fashion...as that I stept no more upon this earth; but did go offwards into the Void. (203)

To walk through absolute darkness is to enter another world in which both reality and self seem illusory. The Night Land is itself a borderland, an unreal, hostile world that humans have accessed through the passage of time and into which both physical and immaterial manifestations of the other can intrude from somewhere else—somewhere unspeakable and incomprehensible. This somewhere else, beyond the borderland of the Night Land, is represented by the unfathomable horrors of the House of Silence, and the terrifying invisible doorways. X struggles to describe these horrors, emphasising their incomprehensibility: 'my thoughts are but the thoughts of a little child, before so great a mystery; and that I touch not even the edge and fringe of the truth' (171). The mystery

is too vast for human brains, which can only process ‘symbols of something’, while the ‘truth’ resists direct representation or adequate interpretation.

In *The House on the Borderland*, the Recluse’s visionary sequences bring him close to ‘the edge and fringe of the truth’ about the nature of the universe. The Recluse undertakes a protracted mystical journey to the Central Suns that recalls the astral journeys made by occultists. This lengthy journey begins with the Recluse observing time apparently speeding up, watching ‘the sun rise and set, within a space of time to be measured by seconds’ (*House* 165). Hundreds and thousands of years seem to pass, until the house and his own dead body crumble to nothing. ‘I was a bodyless thing,’ he tells us; he has become pure spirit (170). Finally, as ‘by millions of years, time winged onward through eternity, to the end’, the rotation of the earth slows to a halt and the sun and stars begin to die.³⁵

The earth is drawn in towards the Central Suns as dead planets begin to fall into it, and the Recluse’s experience grows more peculiar: less astronomical, and more mystical. He is conscious that ‘I had passed at once into some further and, until then, invisible dimension’ (185). The emphasis of his vision is on revelation rather than destruction. ‘I became steadily more conscious of a new mystery about me, telling me that I had, indeed, penetrated within the borderland of some unthought of region—some subtle, unintangible place, or form, of existence’ (183). He notices a ‘countless profusion’ of ‘moving sparks’ which he thinks are ‘messengers from the Central Sun’, perhaps carrying the secrets of the universe that occultists sought to gather on their astral journeys. Blavatsky notes that the ‘Occultists of the East’ posited a ‘Central Sun’ as ‘the centre of Universal life-Electricity ... the one attracting, as also the ever-emitting, life Centre’ (*Secret Doctrine* Vol. 2 240). The start of the Recluse’s journey to the Central Suns marks where *The House on the Borderland* shifts from the realm of

³⁵ Chapter Six will return to this sequence more fully, comparing it to the similar setting in *The Night Land* and the Time Traveller’s experience in Wells’s *The Time Machine*.
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Wellsian entropy to a vision of Theosophical, or occultist, ultimate meaning. Hodgson's Central Suns fit into this scheme of the mystical centre of the universe, offering its double secrets of the opposition between death and life.

Ultimately, however, these secrets prove elusive. As the Recluse tries to decipher what he thinks might be an encounter with 'the Eternal', his ability to describe his experience breaks down:

Huge, vague thoughts had birth within me. I felt, suddenly, terribly naked. And an awful Nearness, shook me.

And Heaven! ... Was that an illusion?

My thoughts came and went, erratically. (*House* 186)

The secrets of time and the universe are partially unlocked for the Recluse, but at crucial moments he cannot make sense of or process what he is experiencing, or even describe it. Similarly, in his earlier journey to the Sea of Sleep, the manuscript itself, like Dr. Matheson's, becomes 'undecipherable' and the editor prints only 'such fragments as are legible' (161). The failure of text and language to represent the other reality keeps it veiled in shadows, refracted through the gaps and silences of the borderland.

Conclusion

If it is only through symbols that humans can cope with the true horrors of the natural universe, then *The Great God Pan* is a novel about what happens when the reality beyond the symbols is exposed. In *The Night Land*, unfortunate humans go beyond, drawn into the invisible 'Doorways in the Night' and the House of Silence. Both result in destruction of the human soul: the House threatens the 'horror of utter destruction' X tells us (108). Villiers, describing one of Helen's victims, tells Austin he 'had looked into the eyes of a lost soul... the man's outward form remained, but all hell was within

it' (Machen *Pan* 38). The limits of the known world are the limits of human experiential capacity.

Characteristically, the borderland realms of these novels offer horrifying and distorted reflections of human experience. If the spectral is a double, it is a reflection of the self at the same time as it is other. It must therefore tell us something about ourselves or our existence, as it does in Hodgson's fiction: our liminal potential for materiality (through the organic monsters examined in Chapter Five) or immateriality (as the ghost pirates do, in Chapter Four). Hodgson's Gothic borderlands indicate our human potential for terrible as well as transcendental spirituality, and Chapter Seven explores this dualistic vision further in the future world of *The Night Land*. The next chapter turns in particular to the borderland of the sea. For Hodgson, not only is the sea the perfect liminal environment for his fantastic fiction, but it is the ideal 'dark glass' for the distorted doubling of the world above the water with the world beneath the waves.

Chapter Four

Spectre shallops and living shadows: *The Ghost Pirates*, other states of existence, and legends of the phantom ship

The sea itself is a borderland realm. In *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* and the stories of Hodgson's Sargasso Sea mythos, the Sargasso is an environment in which *fin-de-siècle* fears and anxieties are played out through the construction of monstrous bodies on the boundaries of the human shape. The physical monstrosities of Hodgson's fiction are primarily examined in Chapter Five, while this chapter explores the function of the sea as a site for borderland encounters. The sea is a liminal region of both natural and supernatural potential, and Hodgson's Gothic sea fiction combines both natural and supernatural themes, drawing on ideas derived from evolutionism and psychical research to adapt legends of the sea to a modern context.

Many of Hodgson's stories draw on familiar myths of sea-monsters. The weed-men of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* or the shark-man of 'The Haunted *Pampero*', for example, combine human and sea-creature characteristics in Gothic distortions of mermaids, while the legend of the kraken is revived in the betentacled monsters of 'A Tropical Horror' and 'From the Tideless Sea'.³⁶ However, the sea is also a conceptually unstable region providing imaginative scope for the supernatural tale, fed by ghostly superstitions of the sea: phantom ships like the *Flying Dutchman*, ship spirits, revenants and apparitions, and omens of storms and destruction.

³⁶ Kraken: 'A mythical sea monster of enormous size, said to appear off the coast of Norway' (*Shorter OED*, p. 1523). See also Tennyson's 'The Kraken' (1830).
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This chapter examines the liminal borderland of the sea and focuses on *The Ghost Pirates* to explore the encounter with the other. We will see in *The Ghost Pirates* that the inhabitants of the borderland are governed by different laws of reality and materiality. Encounter with them is only enabled when the boundary is weakened: a circumstance in which the rules of neither world fully apply. This chapter will also explore the significance of legends of the phantom ship for *The Ghost Pirates*, and suggest that Hodgson draws on a rich tradition of maritime myths to produce a modern Gothic mystery based on *fin-de-siècle* psychical research, which focuses his philosophical worldview of incomprehensible horror back on the environment of the sea from which he derived it.

The borderland of the sea

Ships and seafaring have changed over the centuries, but links remain between Hodgson's experiences of the 1890s and those of earlier generations of sailors: the character of the sea, for example, its legends and superstitions, the dangers of severe storms. In Europe's long maritime history, the sea figures as an uncertain and dangerous region, with seafaring, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, bearing a high mortality rate. Marcus Rediker, discussing eighteenth-century merchant sailing, observes that for the sailor the risk of death was always at hand:

'Sea men are to be numbered neither with the living nor the dead,' explained a minister familiar with the dangers of life at sea; sailors' 'lives [hang] continually in suspence [sic] before them.' In their daily work, mused another cleric, seamen 'border upon the Confines of Death and Eternity, every moment.' The perils at the edge of eternity haunted the eighteenth-century deep-sea sailor as he plied the forbidding oceans of the globe in small, brittle wooden vessels. (Rediker 3)

Alone and isolated at sea, ships embarked on voyages along the margins of life and death, and the status of sailors as living beings is ambivalent. Like Schrödinger's cat, the voyaging sailor is neither dead nor alive, governed by the uncertainty principle of the sea. In Frederick Marryat's *The Phantom Ship*, Vanderdecken, the cursed captain of the *Flying Dutchman*, returns to his wife cold and dripping; 'I felt as if I had embraced ice', she recalls. 'I am not dead,' Vanderdecken tells her, 'nor yet am I alive. I hover between this world and the world of spirits' (11). To be on a deep-sea voyage is to occupy a borderland, and this finds expression in literature and in sea legends through phantoms and revenants of lost ships and sailors from the graveyard of the sea.

Accounts of severe storms underline the consciousness of death in the forefront of a sailor's mind:

As callous as the seaman appeared toward the death that took so many shapes around him, he could not escape its shadows. William Dampier, who had endured all manner of black and blustering weather, said that one particularly terrifying storm resembled nothing so much as 'approaching death'. (Rediker 194)³⁷

These comments quoted by Rediker date back to the eighteenth century, but Hodgson's experience on modern sailing ships in the 1890s, even with the improvements of steam, iron or steel hulls, and advances in meteorology, must still have been a dangerous career. In a slideshow lecture, Hodgson described a cyclonic storm as 'the most terrible and frightening thing to be met with upon this earth' ('Through the Heart of a Cyclone'

³⁷ Rediker quotes from William Dampier, 'A New Voyage round the World' (1729), 514.

111).³⁸ In his sea stories, characters on storm-beleaguered ships literally look death in the face: in ‘Out of the Storm’, a stormy sea becomes personified as a hellish monster: ‘the Sea is laughing ... I can hear its voice echo like Satanic thunder’, and later ‘*It* has swamped the ships. Only the forecastle, bridge and poop stick up out from the bestial, reeking *Thing*, like three islands in the midst of shrieking foam’ (143, 144). Death, sea, and monster are all conflated into a single overwhelming terror.

The descriptions in Hodgson’s stories are clearly affected by his sense of the awe and terror of storms as well as the sometimes unusual meteorological effects he had witnessed at sea, particularly his experience of cyclones: the unearthly effects produced by this phenomenon find their way into his fiction. In ‘Through the Vortex of a Cyclone’, a creative and descriptive account of the cyclone experience that inspired the slideshow, he notes ‘a sunset of quite indescribable gorgeousness, which had, to me, an unnatural glow about it’ and stalk lightning like ‘pale, flickering streaks and tongues of flame *rising apparently out of the sea*’ (‘Vortex’ 121). These phenomena precede the cyclone. In the midst of the storm, Hodgson describes ‘a rift in the clouds through which the sun was shining with a queer brightness’ (129). ‘From the Tideless Sea’ echoes this description; the narrator watches a cyclone

hurling upwards in jets and peaks of living brine, and falling back in a continuous thunder of foam. Imagine this, if you can, and then have the clouds break away suddenly overhead, and the moon shine down upon that hellish turmoil, and you will have such a sight has been given to mortals but seldom, save with death. (‘From the Tideless Sea’ 68)

³⁸ Hodgson appears to have been greatly affected by the experience of the cyclonic storm and returns to it several times: ‘Through the Heart of a Cyclone’, a slideshow lecture; ‘Through the Vortex of a Cyclone’, a fully written account reading very like a short story, with photographs; and several descriptions in short stories of similar storms. © Emily Alder 2009

Like Dampier, quoted above, Hodgson represents the storm as a glimpse of death, or of what only the dead should see.

The very real danger posed to a seaman means that for most if not all of seafaring history the sea has figured as this borderland of life and death, with two implications. Firstly, that the sea becomes a borderland of reality, in which stories of uncertain reliability take place, and in which, for the writer of the supernatural or fantastic, natural laws or probabilities can be stretched. Secondly, the sea becomes a borderland of mortality in which the encounter with the immaterial other, especially the dead or phantom other, can take place.

Hodgson's maritime experiences inflect more than just his sea fiction. Chapter Three has shown how these terrifying borderland glimpses occur in *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland*, too. *The Night Land*, with its lone Redoubt, for example, shares the same preoccupation with isolation as the sea fiction (the stranded *Homebird* of 'From the Tideless Sea', for example, alone in the Sargasso for twenty-nine years). The Great Redoubt is little more than a different type of ship in a different type of ocean: dark and uncharted, the Night Land conceals a multiplicity of horrors in its shadowy depths. Hodgson derives this bleak worldview in part from the near-death dramas provided by his sea experiences; 'Through the Vortex of a Cyclone', for example, is based on a real, near-fatal voyage, with emphasis from the ship's captain on 'If we get through', and an injured sailor is swept to his death by the waves ('Vortex' 132, 134).

Hodgson's poem 'The Place of Storms', in *The Calling of the Sea* (1920), revisits the theme of stormy oceans as portals to horror. It includes glimpses of such terrors as the brightly-lit 'House of Storms', hanging in a spray-doused rift like a marine House of Silence, surrounded by hosts of 'sodden souls', while overhead the stars shine through the clearing sky like an omen of protection: 'in that anguished moment, from the sky,/ Brilliant and clear, within a circle dark,/ Shone the great Star of peace' ('The Place of

Storms' 17, 19, 21). Into this long poem Hodgson seems to pack every idea the sea inspired in him, on which his prose fiction expands. It frequently echoes Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' which similarly uses the sea as a site for the encounter with death. Continually, then, Hodgson returns compulsively to the borderland of the sea, the source of some of his most frightening horror stories regardless of their setting.

The sea as a liminal space

In literature, the sea is a liminal region in many respects. Within it, ships, islands, storms, whirlpools, mist, sunset, and chasms all form points of access between one form of reality and another. In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, for example,

Moreau's island is an imaginary space that lies beyond the limits of human experience, a realm of the abject produced by volcanic eruptions spewing magma from the Earth's mantle across a tectonic boundary.

...The ambiguities surrounding the island and its inhabitants suggest that the island of Dr. Moreau is a liminal space at the border between fiction and reality. (Redfern 39)

Prendick's adventure is unverifiable because the island is never positively identified. The introduction, by Prendick's nephew, can only record that Prendick 'passed out of human knowledge about latitude 5° S. and longitude 105° E., and reappeared in the same part of the ocean after a space of eleven months' (*Moreau* Introduction). These facts confirm the framing particulars of Prendick's story, but cast doubt on the events of what has happened in between, leaving the 'truth' open to interpretation.

Edgar Allan Poe also makes use of the ocean as an unknown and potentially unreal region, in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) and in 'Manuscript Found in a

Bottle' (1833). In both tales, the characters are driven by storms into strange experiences, and both stories end with the narrator and his vessel caught by a strong southerly current, ending in a whirlpool and a cataract respectively, which sucks them down, perhaps into the ocean, or inside the earth through the mythical polar hole. In 'Manuscript', the narrator, one of only two survivors of a hurricane-damaged ship, is flung onto a strange ship that runs them down during a storm. The ancient crew cannot see him, and the 'strange model' of the ship puzzles him. Either the narrator is on a supernatural ship, or else he is hallucinating.³⁹ Both sea and ships are ambivalent, unstable spaces in which the facts of the story, like Prendick's, are uncertain. The manuscript concludes apparently moments before the ship is sucked into the ocean: 'we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool—and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering, oh God! and—going down' (Poe 109). The narrator's proximity to his death by drowning as he writes gives the manuscript an immediacy not otherwise achievable, presenting the reader with a close-up glimpse of that fatal borderline.

A similar effect is achieved in Hodgson's 'Out of the Storm', in which the story is received real-time by means of an 'instrument' transmitting the words of a man aboard a doomed sailing ship. The ship is assailed by both the 'vast seas' of a storm, and a 'Thing' that spreads 'an infection of sin' with its breath. Through this instrument, the doomed sailor recounts his view of the storm:

a sight that none is allowed to see and live. It is a picture for the doomed and the dead; one of the sea's hell-orgies—one of the *Thing's* monstrous gloatings over the living—say the alive-in-death, those upon the brink. ...

³⁹ The ship's size and ancient crew links Poe's story to maritime legends of giant ships. The storm in which the strange ship sails also suggests the *Flying Dutchman*, supposed to sail successfully in weather too violent for ordinary ships.

The doomed living shall know some of the things that death has hitherto so well guarded. ('Out of the Storm' 143)

The sailor, unnaturally close to experiences reserved for the dead, believes he is exposing a forbidden glimpse of hell; a glimpse of the terrible world beyond the veil that Baumhoff and Dr. Raymond achieve through their scientific experiments. The storm breaches the fragile boundary between the world of life and the world of death. The sailor's sensation of being on the brink of life, 'alive-in-death', echoes *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in which Life-in-Death wins the mariner in a game of dice with Death (Coleridge 3.195-8). Coleridge's mariner, like Marryat's Vanderdecken, also hovers between worlds until his curse is lifted. As in 'From the Tideless Sea', the storm positions the seafarers on the border of life and death, and undergoes a Gothic transformation into a borderland of hellish horror, of the sort the living are never meant to see.

In Hodgson's 'Out of the Storm', the narrating sailor, delirious with terror, conflates the Thing with God and God with the sea: '*The sea is now all the God there is!*' ('Out of the Storm' 144). The Thing is a physical, demonic manifestation of the stormy sea: 'it roared... churning and growling; then surged away' (148). Finally, the sailor succumbs, leaving us with his final words: 'The Sea has come for me! ... My God! I am drowning! I—am—dr—' (149). Like Poe's 'Manuscript', written up until the last moment, Hodgson's use of a piece of wireless technology (albeit described in the vaguest of terms) brings the immediacy of the story to the forefront, right up to the moment of the sailor's death. As the framing narrator and his 'friend the scientist' read the story, the events are actually taking place. In 'Out of the Storm', life and death are temporally, shockingly, juxtaposed; distance is vanquished, and the horror of the 'brink' is immediately and terribly rendered.

Evil is externalised; hell is presented as the source of evil and sin as well as its destination. 'Out of the Storm' gives a glimpse through to the other side; in the borderland of the sea, the storm forms the gateway to the world beyond. This world is not benevolent. Luckhurst notes that in contrast to the 'largely benign' forces proposed by Myers and late Victorian psychical research, Hodgson's are 'active, wilful, and malignantly Satanic' (*Invention* 190). As in *The Great God Pan*, the veil is rent to expose unspeakable horrors that humans cannot deal with: both Mary and the sailor are driven mad. The Thing of 'Out of the Storm' reaches into our world with physical presence as well as supernatural hellishness, manifesting on the borders of materiality. Like the spirit manifestations of the séance, the forces from the other side, defined by spiritualists in terms of unknown forces of nature rather than powers of supernatural, can take on organic form, physically as well as spectrally reaching across the border.

Hodgson's seas isolate ships and characters from the rest of the world, a device to allow their strange and sometimes fantastical adventures to take place. The 'deep-sea vessel,' says Rediker, was 'so far-flung about the oceans of the globe as to be isolated from any landed society and its dominant patterns of social life' (158). To be on board such a ship is to be living a liminal existence in the borderland world of the ocean, whether this is a legal, social, or imaginative world. In Hodgson's stories, the isolation of the ship means that it is cut off as much from other forms of reality as it is from 'landed society'.

In Conrad's *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), the ship becomes

a fragment detached from the earth, [which] went on lonely and swift like a small planet. Round her the abysses of sky and sea met in an unattainable frontier. A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same. (29)

Discussing this passage, Ian Watt remarks that ‘the main focus is on the imperative power which the sea, like other forces of nature, exercises on the lives of the men who sail upon it. . . . The passage holds the reader with a deepening sense of man’s lonely voyaging towards unattainable frontiers’ (96). Conrad’s description emphasises the isolation of the ship and represents it as a world of its own, disconnected from the rest of the globe.

Conversely, when the ship reaches Britain it becomes part of the land again: ‘The *Narcissus* came gently into her berth; . . . a swarm of strange men, clambering up her sides, took possession of her in the name of the sordid earth. She had ceased to live’ (165). The *Narcissus* seems only to have a true existence when she is afloat, moving on the sea. However, this sea-going identity itself is not fixed; the ship exists on the boundaries of culture, society, nation, or of life, imagination, reality. Like the haunted house, the ship is a space in which the rules of the natural and supernatural can be recreated without reference to the objective outside world. The ship, however, is a moving, moveable haunted space; the *Mortzestus* of *The Ghost Pirates* moves in and out of an alternative reality, which, like the sea, seems unstable and unpredictable.

The sea, mysterious, changeable and unmappable, was the source or object of many superstitions about alternative worlds or dimensions. In *Credulities Past and Present* (1880), William Jones recounts a story of a ship in the clouds seen anchored to the land, from which a sailor falls and is ‘suffocated by our damp thick atmosphere’ (3). He cites a thirteenth-century account of “‘the existence of a sea above this earth of ours, situated in the air, or over it’” (4). The sea is a parallel world, set apart from the land-bound world, but still alongside it and sometimes connected to it.

Hodgson’s *The Ghost Pirates* suggests a parallel existence of shadowy ships and sailors beneath the sea, which mirror the real ship *Mortzestus* and its sailors. On a similar theme, in *Superstitions of Sailors* (1929), Angelo S. Rappoport describes the belief in a world beneath the waves: ‘The belief has always prevailed that the depths of

the sea were the abode of a particular world and inhabited by various beings either graceful or monstrous, terrible or benevolent' (141). Later, he comments that in early history 'men were still unacquainted with the various phenomena and meteorological laws and, as in a glass, they saw darkly many things not only upon the waves, but beneath them. ... The sea repeated in its mirror the sky and the shore and the land beyond' (146-7). Interestingly, Rappoport uses the metaphor of the dark mirror from 1 Corinthians, discussed earlier, which suggests a dark reflection of the real world, dimly understood, in the sea. In the world beneath the waves, animals and plants were supposed each to have their counterparts (157), and in *The Ghost Pirates*, this seems to apply to ships and sailors too. The counterpart shadow ship and ghost pirates are threatening and demonic; the parallel underwater world is a Gothic distortion of the world above.

Sea legends and superstitions

In superstition, then, the sea becomes a physical and literal borderland as well as a metaphorical one. It is a short step to understanding this world under the sea as the place where sea ghosts and phantom ships come from. Into the sea is where the dead go, since it is a graveyard for sailors as well as for wrecked ships, and it is the sea from which the dead return. In some of Hodgson's stories, however, such as *The Ghost Pirates* or 'The Habitants of Middle Islet', the appearance of ghosts is complicated further as Hodgson introduces physical characteristics and blurs the line between material and immaterial horrors, natural and supernatural, leaving open the interpretation of the sea's borderland manifestations.

As well as conceiving the sea as a liminal area on the border not only of reality and unreality but also as life and death, Hodgson draws on maritime legends and combines them with ideas derived from spiritualism and psychical research. 'The Riven Night' encapsulates many of these ideas, drawing the ship into an unreal region of the sea

bordering on the supernatural, and depicting an encounter with ghosts in a manner which evokes both spiritualist communication with the dead and certain sea legends. In 'The Riven Night', the ship's shift into borderland is marked by the 'impalpable billows of mist' that surround it (514). Ghostly shapes appear from the fog: 'shapes clothed mistily, that watched us with great sombre eyes... legions upon legions of those spirit forms' (515). The watching forms recall the big-eyed watchers of 'The Plattner Story', and similarly seem meant to represent the spirits of the dead who have a connection with those of the living. Some of the sailors recognise wives and family members among these ghosts and are drawn from the ship to their destruction; the captain throws himself into the sea, and the narrator sees 'a shadowy form with a face like that of the Captain's, float upwards into the violet twilight' (516).

Among the spirits, the narrator notices 'the face and figure of a lovely young girl', identified as 'Mary' by one of the sailors. The ghost puts 'one ghostly hand to her heart, and I saw the handle of a sailor's sheath-knife showing starkly. ... Langstone's voice rose shrilly, "Mary! Mary! Forgive..." He stopped abruptly. The girl-spirit after that one accusing gesture had turned away coldly... with a cry of "God help me," [Langstone] leapt away out into the purple billows' (515). Rappoport describes a Scottish legend in which

a sailor is said to have suddenly seen the ghost of his murdered bride. She appeared in the shape of a brilliant light over the water. The nearer she came the more distinctly appeared the human shape. At last she called him by name, and both seaman and bride disappeared in the brilliant light. The dead bride had come to claim her affianced from the living. (244)

Hodgson's version tracks this legend closely, except that he hints more explicitly at the perpetrator of the murder. Such legends long pre-date spiritualism, of course, but in other cases Hodgson's versions adopt spiritualist rhetoric more explicitly.

A similar incident occurs in 'Habitants of Middle Islet', in which the appearance of the ghost of a dead sweetheart lures the narrator's companion into the sea to drown. However, it is unclear whether it really is her ghost, or merely a malicious entity wearing her appearance, since she returns to threaten the remaining sailors. The story is given a further monstrous, Gothic turn by hinting that the supposed ghost is something material, with hands like 'the talons of a wild beast' ('Middle Islet' 510). Again in this story, the supernatural manifestation is preceded by the narrator sensing 'an unnameable something in the air, as though the very atmosphere of the place were a medium of terror' (508). It is not exactly mist, but it is 'something in the air', suggesting both a shift of states of reality and evoking the ability of the psychic or mesmerist to sense the charged air of spiritual communication. Hodgson uses legends of sea ghosts or apparitions and combines these old stories with more modern late nineteenth-century theories about the spirit world.

The Ghost Pirates also draws on phantom ship legends, of which there are many, each with several variations. Phantom ships can take various forms: lights that are seen and vanish, ships that do not respond to attempts at communication, long-lost ships making a brief return in ghost form to their home ports, before disappearing into mist. In the story of *La Belle Rosalie* a grieving bride, Maria Batiste, sees her fiancé returning to the harbour, only for the ship to fade away with the mist at dawn (Rappoport 223-5). The best known phantom ship is *The Flying Dutchman*, supposed to sail off the Cape of Good Hope. A glimpse of the phantom ship was famously recorded by Prince Albert Victor and Prince George of Wales in 1881:

July 11th—At 4 a.m. the *Flying Dutchman* crossed our bows. A strange red light as of a phantom ship, all aglow, in the midst of which light the masts, spars, and sails of a brig 200 yards distant stood out in strange relief ... [the midshipman] was sent forward at once to the forecandle; but upon arriving there was no vestige nor any sign whatever of any material ship was to be seen either near or right away to the horizon. (*Cruise of the HMS Bacchante* 551)

Sir Walter Scott's *Rokeby* (1813) features a 'Phantom Ship', a 'Demon Frigate' known as a 'harbinger of wreck and woe' (Canto 2.11). In the notes to the poem, Scott wrote that this passage alluded to

a well-known nautical superstition concerning a fantastic vessel, called by sailors the Flying Dutchman, ... distinguished from earthly vessels by bearing a press of sail when all others are unable, from stress of weather, to show an inch of canvas. The cause of her wandering is not altogether certain; but the general account is, that she was originally a vessel loaded with great wealth, on board of which some horrid act of murder and piracy had been committed ... as a punishment for their crimes, the apparition of the ship still continues to haunt those seas in which the catastrophe took place, and is considered by the mariners as the worst of all possible omens. (355)

The *Flying Dutchman*, as it does in Marryat's *Phantom Ship*, is not purely a phantom but a ship of unnaturally extended existence, neither belonging to the living world nor part of the dead. The pieces of this legend adopted by Hodgson in *The Ghost Pirates* include the apparition haunting the sea, and the omen of catastrophe it represents.

However, Hodgson also draws on other, related legends. A tale sometimes conflated with the *Flying Dutchman* is the legend of the *Libra Nos*, said to be sailed by a skeletons (Begg 119). Thomas Moore's 'Written On Passing Dead-man's Island' (1804), describes a phantom ship with a skeletal crew:

See you, beneath yon cloud so dark,
Fast gliding along, a gloomy bark?
Her sails are full, though the wind is still,
And there blows not a breath her sails to fill!
[...]
To Dead-Man's Isle, in the eye of the blast,
To Dead-Man's Isle, she speeds her fast;
By skeleton shapes her sails are furl'd,
And the hand that steers is not of this world!
(Moore 279)

The *Flying Dutchman*, according to Scott, bears full sail during a storm. Moore's gloomy bark, however, is moving under full sail although 'there blows not a breath her sails to fill!', more like the *Sangier's* view of the *Mortzestus*: 'I saw the sails fill bang up with wind; and yet, you know, ours were slatting' (*Ghost Pirates* 132). Both the gloomy bark and the *Mortzestus* seem to sail somewhere between this world and another, suggested by the 'skeletal shapes' of the crew and the other-world pilot. Hodgson's twist is that, like Poe's 'Manuscript' and the 'ghastly crew' of Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner', his tale is told from the point of view of one on board the 'ghost' ship rather than from that of those who observe her.

Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* tells the tale of the *Flying Dutchman* from the point of view of Philip, son of its captain, Vanderdecken. In this version, the *Flying Dutchman* is

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doomed to sail until Vanderdecken can redeem his blasphemy by kissing a relic, carried by his son. The *Flying Dutchman* heralds storm and disaster to other sailors, including Philip, and it is not until he is an old man himself that he manages to make direct contact with his father and release him from the curse. The *Dutchman* is characterised by misty surroundings, full sail during a gale when others are becalmed, and is variously solid and ethereal in its substance. Vanderdecken, as has been noted, considers himself existing on the border of life and death, just as his ship is on the border of materiality and immateriality.

The *Flying Dutchman* legend is not a direct source for *The Ghost Pirates*, but through Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* it nevertheless exercises considerable influence. Here, too, questions are raised over the materiality and non-materiality of ships and pirates, over the sudden appearances and disappearances of the ships in view from the *Mortzestus* as she moves in and out of the two realms, and the disaster of the ship's wreck is heralded by the incursions of the ghost pirates. Representations of the *Flying Dutchman* are diverse, and Hodgson's shadow-ship in *The Ghost Pirates* is in many ways another retelling of the phantom ship myth. Furthermore, other legends of the sea, such as ship spirits and omens or apparitions, also seem to have influenced *The Ghost Pirates*, and will be discussed in context.

The Ghost Pirates

In *The Ghost Pirates*, the phantom ship takes the form of a giant shadow-ship deep in the sea, and a smoky form rising out of the water. However, in some ways the *Mortzestus* herself also takes on the role of the ghost ship; her failure to respond to signals, for example, while her name—'mort-zest-us'—is in itself suggestive of 'life-in-death'. Furthermore, other ships also take on the characteristics of the phantom ship: at night, Jessop sees lights of other ships, which then mysteriously vanish like the lights

glimpsed by HMS *Bacchante*. Hodgson wrote an addendum to *The Ghost Pirates*,
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called 'The Silent Ship', essentially a stand-alone short story, told from the point of view of the crew of the *Sangier*, the ship that rescues Jessop (although in this version he does not survive to tell his tale). It describes the final overwhelming and sinking of the *Mortzestus* by the ghost pirates. Hodgson was unable to publish 'The Silent Ship', but it eventually found publication in 1973 under the suggestive title 'The Phantom Ship' (Lassen x). *The Ghost Pirates* explores an alternative explanation for sea ghost stories, redefined by *fin-de-siècle* occult and spiritualist theories about the existence of other dimensions.

'Out of some other dimension'

In sea stories, shifts of states of reality, the move into borderland, is often heralded by smoke or mist, often at sunset. In both Poe's 'Manuscript Found in a Bottle' and *The Ghost Pirates*, this shift is marked by mist. In 'Manuscript', one evening the narrator observes a 'remarkable' cloud which at sunset 'spread all at once to the eastward and westward, girding in the horizon with a narrow strip of vapour'. He also notices 'the peculiar character of the sea' which was 'undergoing a rapid change, and the water seemed more than usually transparent'. Finally, the 'air now became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron' (Poe 100). This peculiar atmosphere anticipates the weirdness to come, and follows directly from the description of the 'coir, jaggeree, ghee, cocoa-nuts, and a few cases of opium'. As Charles May observes, these, 'clumsily' stowed, may have broken open and, in the heat, combined to produce the hallucinogenic effect that casts doubt on the veracity of the story (23-7).

The 'Manuscript' narrator's observations of the sea and sky may be compared to Jessop's description of 'the convolutions of heated air' surrounding the *Mortzestus*, and the appearance of 'a faint mist' at sunset, which 'spread across the face of the sun, so that its light shone now as though it came through a dim haze of smoke' (*Ghost Pirates*

114). We might see the moment of sunset as the point at which the story moves into the unreal, recalling Hodgson's description of the 'unnatural' sunset preceding the cyclone: 'I saw the mist rise faintly—the setting sun shining through it, dim and unreal' (53). May suggests that in 'Manuscript', the sailors cannot see the narrator because 'he does not exist in the same realm of reality as that of his fictional projections', and this also holds true if we interpret the strange crew as ghost sailors instead (May 25). Poe's narrator complains that 'the people *will not see*', much as the sailors on the *Mortzestus* cannot see the other ships which no longer exist in the same realm of reality.⁴⁰

Jessop notices that mist appears to mark the passage of the *Mortzestus* into some other or borderland dimension that conceals the real world and other ships from the sailors. He observes that 'the whole ship was surrounded by a thinnish haze that quite hid the horizon' (*Ghost Pirates* 52). Once the mist has faded, the *Mortzestus* is apparently sailing on 'the blank surface of the sea, reaching everywhere to the empty horizon' (54), recalling the 'great circular solitude' in which Conrad's *Narcissus* travelled. Jessop observes that other ships that had been in sight have now vanished. Thorpe offers a Scandinavian legend: 'It often happens that mariners in the wide ocean see a ship—in all respects resembling a real one—sailing by, and at the same instant vanishing from their sight. It is the spectre-ship, and forbodes that a vessel will soon go to the bottom on that spot' (Thorpe *Northern Mythology* Vol. 2 276). The sudden appearance and vanishing of another ship from Jessop's view at first suggests to him that he is looking at an imaginary ship, as he might a spectre ship, but he gradually concludes that the peculiarity is about the *Mortzestus* herself.

⁴⁰ In Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, sunset also marks a shift between states of reality, ushering the arrival of Death and Life-in-Death's skeletal ship:

The western wave was all a-flame.
The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun. (3.171-6)

He again glimpses the other ship, which then ‘grew indistinct, and vanished again; but I was convinced that she was real, and had been in sight all the time, if I could have seen her’ (*Ghost Pirates* 54). He realises that the loss of sight of any vessels coincides with the first occasion of the mist. In fine weather, the ships with which they shared their course should always be visible: ‘This reasoning seemed to me to show, unmistakably, some connection between the coming of the mist, and our inability to see’ (56). Yet the veil is incomplete or inconsistent, allowing Jessop indistinct glimpses of the other ship, which can see the *Mortzestus* and runs up a string of flags.

Similarly, later, at night, he and other sailors sporadically sight ships’ lights: lights that ought, like the first ship’s flag signals, to be warning the oblivious *Mortzestus* to get out of the way, but instead leave them puzzled. The danger is not merely from the ghostly pirates, but there is also a real risk to, and from, other shipping as the *Mortzestus* lingers half in one world and half in another. Jessop feels as though ‘I had looked at her [the other ship] from out of some other dimension’, a dimension that blinds rather than conceals (56).

In legend, the appearance and disappearance of phantom ships is often accompanied by mist or smoke. *La Belle Rosalie* fades into the mist, and Begg quotes a 1648 account by New Englander John Winthrop of ‘The Spectre of New Haven’:

‘There appeared over the harbor at New Haven in the evening, the form of a keel of a ship with three masts, to which were suddenly added all the tackling and sails ... Then from the side of the ship which was toward the town arose a great smoke, which covered all the ship, and in that smoke she vanished away; but some saw her keel sink into the water’. (121)

Mist denotes the crossing into borderland but also indicates the glimpse into it. In *The Phantom Ship*, Philip’s first sight of the *Flying Dutchman* occurs as

the gloom seemed to clear away, and a lambent pale blaze to light up the water ... there was indeed a large ship about three miles distant; but although it was a perfect calm, she was to all appearance buffeting in a violent gale... Each minute she was plainer to the view. ... the gloom gradually rose, and in a few seconds she had totally disappeared! (93)

This incident is followed by a heavy storm and shipwreck. Later, another captain reports hearing the calls of the *Flying Dutchman*'s crew from within 'a ball of fog', and a priest adds that 'its appearance was the precursor of disaster', as it has already proved for Philip (128, 129).

La Belle Rosalie and the Spectre of New Haven dissolve away into the mist, but in other legends, including the *Flying Dutchman*, the ship emerges out of the mist, and often out of the water at the same time. Allan Cunningham's *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry*, published 1887, offers two interesting tales. In 'The Last Lord of Helvellyn', the narrator experiences a vision of a ghost ship which portends a catastrophe a day later. He sees

a low dark mist arise from the middle of the Solway; which, swelling out suddenly came rolling huge and sable towards the Cumberland shore. Nor was fear or fancy long in supplying this exhalation with sails and pennons.... I observed it become more dark, and assume more distinctly the shape of a barge, with a shroud for a sail. It left the sea, and settled on the beach, maintaining still its form, and still sending forth the merry din of mariners. In a moment the voices were changed from mirth to sorrow; and I heard a sound, an outcry like the shriek of a ship's company whom the sea is swallowing. The cloud dissolved away, and in its place I beheld,

as it were, the forms of seven men, shaped from the cloud, and stretched black on the beach; even as corpses are prepared for the coffin. (206)

The narrator's account acknowledges the element of 'fancy' that attributes shape to natural mist from the sea, which, along with mirage, may account for some of these misty ship myths. The similarity of this description to Jessop's vision of the misty ship at sunset is striking:

away on the starboard bow, a faint mist drove up out of the sea. ... as I watched, the weird mistiness collected and shaped and rose into three towers. These became more definite, and there was something elongated beneath them. The shaping and forming continued, and almost suddenly I saw that the thing had taken on the shape of a great ship (*Ghost Pirates* 114).

Jessop appears to be seeing a shadow-like ship taking form and disappearing into the water, perhaps to join the other shadow-ships beneath them, ghostly reflections of the shipping on the surface.

In 'The Last Lord of Helvellyn', the next day the eponymous Lord's new barge is launched, but one of the mariners later reports 'a ship formed of a black cloud, sailing beside us, which moved as we moved, and tacked as we tacked ... the spectre shallop of Solway, which always sails by the side of the ship which the sea is about to swallow' (208). The new barge is destroyed by a whirlwind, and the bodies of the Lord's son and six mariners are duly washed up on the same spot where the narrator saw his vision.

In *The Ghost Pirates*, as two of the pirates' victims, Svensen and Jock, are buried, Jessop and Tammy watch the sail-wrapped bodies sink into the sea, and notice the 'shadow of a ship rising out of the unexplored immensity beneath our keel' (106). Later

Jessop detects more clearly, ‘after a few moments staring, the shadow of a royal-yard, and, deeper, the gear and standing-rigging of a great mast. Far down among the shadows, I thought, presently, that I could make out the immense, indefinite stretch of vast decks’ (122). The dimness of the ship and the gradual detection of its details suggests the role of ‘fear or fancy’ in producing them. Jessop admits that ‘I *thought* I could actually see, at time, things moving ... in the gear’ (123). His fears appear to be confirmed later when the ship is over-run by ghost pirates and taken down into the sea, but confirmation is at first delayed, and the gap between imagination and reality is uncertain. Jessop struggles with a ‘blind circle’ of ideas concerning these ships and the man-shaped shadows that ‘had come *out of the sea*’, but eventually concludes ‘Were they the crew?’ (108). Hodgson’s shadow ship and Cunningham’s spectre shallop share the *Flying Dutchman* role of harbinger of disaster. Hodgson’s spectre, however, resolves itself into a material threat: both omen and perpetrator of the sinking of the *Mortzestus*, able to realise itself in the physical world.

Another of Cunningham’s *Traditional Tales*, ‘The Haunted Ships’, is a compendium of anecdotes told to the narrator by old sailors and fishwives, mostly relating to the wrecks of two Danish pirates, the ghosts of which have been seen to haunt the bay. One of these ghost ships is deserted ‘unless something in darkness and form resembling a human shadow could be called a shape, which flitted from extremity to extremity of the ship’ (255). In one story, four young men are lured to destruction by the music and revelry taking place aboard the second ship. In another, the wrecks are partly exorcised by ‘a form of a man’ who strikes them with an oar so that their spectres ‘with mast and canvas and mariners, started up’ and ‘bounded [away], leaving a trace of fire behind them on the billows’ (258). Finally, ‘mariners say that once a year... ye will see the infernal shallops come shoring through the Solway’, piloted by a ‘shadowy figure’, and re-enact the luring of the four young sailors to ‘augment their numbers... Then the spectre ships vanish, and the drowning shriek of mortals and the rejoicing laugh of

fiends are heard, and the old hulls are left as a memorial that the old spiritual kingdom has not departed from the earth' (258-9). This story augments the spectre shallop legend with the addition of shadowy sailors similar to Jessop's glimpses of the ghost pirates. The 'old spiritual kingdom' is redefined as another state of existence as, in Hodgson's hands, the phantom ship legend takes on literally a new dimension, again fuelled by *fin-de-siècle* spiritualist and occultist theories. His ghost ships, his piratical revenants, and the real ship *Mortzestus* move with ease through the borderland of the sea, between sea realm and physical world, between ghostliness and materiality.

In *The Phantom Ship*, towards the end of the novel the *Flying Dutchman* is similarly seen rising from the water:

On the beam of the ship, not more than two cables' length distant, they beheld slowly rising out of the water the tapering masthead and spars of another vessel. She rose, and rose, gradually; her topmasts and topsail yards, with the sails set, next made their appearance; higher and higher she rose up from the element. Her lower masts and rigging, and, lastly, her hull, showed themselves above the surface. (Marryat 380)

The *Dutchman* is not a unequivocally a ghost, however; it is material enough for Philip to go aboard and converse with its sailors. Its emergence from the water bears a strong resemblance to the shadow ship in *The Ghost Pirates*, which does not break the surface, but rises from the depths with its details, similarly, becoming gradually clearer.

Marryat's editor in my 1896 edition of *The Phantom Ship* complains about the author's inconsistency:

We never clearly make out whether the phantom ship is a real ship doomed to sail for ever ... or the ghost of a ship. Sometimes she is one and

sometimes she is the other—a ghost when she sails through the son's vessel, but a real structure of timber when Philip Vanderdecken does at last get on board. No power can establish such a contradiction as a thing which at once is, and is not. (x)

Like the ghost pirate ship and the ghost pirates, the *Flying Dutchman* hovers between materiality and immateriality, able to exist in two worlds at the same time. Phantom ships symbolise the borderland nature of the sea; they are characterised by their ephemeral appearance and disappearance, by their physical emergence from a realm, or graveyard, beneath the waves. Hodgson's marine apparitions, whether of ships or, as we will see, of people, reflect in their borderline existence a distinctly late Victorian preoccupation with the materiality of spectral encounters and the weakened divisions between the living and spiritual worlds.

'Too many shadows'

This borderland ambivalence characterises *The Ghost Pirates*. After his first glimpse of a ghost pirate, Jessop concludes it is 'no mere imaginary thing. It was a human figure. And yet, with the flicker of the moonlight and the shadows chasing over it, I was unable to say more than that' (14). Jessop wavers between explanations: either it is his imagination, or someone playing a practical joke. However, when he sees the figure climb into the sea, Jessop undergoes a crisis of comprehension: 'I felt blank—just horribly blank. It was such a beastly confirmation of the *unnaturalness* of the thing I had concluded to be only a sort of brain fancy.' He is left deprived 'of the power of coherent thought... dazed—mentally stunned'. The call of the Second Mate brings him 'suddenly to [his] ordinary self' and he 'went to the braces, like a chap in a dream' (14). An understanding of the event eludes Jessop as much as a clear sight of the ghost pirate did; there are, Jessop now realises, 'too many shadows' (13).

On witnessing Tom's fall from the rigging, Jessop reports that 'For an instant there was a blur over my eyes, and Williams was singing out something that I could not catch. Then, just as quickly, it went, and I could see again, clearly' (29). The moment of the accident is a moment in which Jessop suddenly cannot hear or see clearly: his senses refuse to interpret what they detect. These incidents operate on the edges of perception and comprehension; to perceive clearly is to understand, and not to perceive is to resist an unwanted truth. Earlier, Jessop observes that the Second Mate 'was reaching out towards the only possible conclusion. Though, goodness knows, it was one that was impossible and improbable enough' (26). The 'only possible conclusion' is not only impossible, but unspeakable; to name it would be to solidify the unthinkable, and Jessop is still in a position of hesitation.

Jessop's glimpse of his first ghost pirate corresponds to Todorov's fantastic hesitation as he wavers between believing it to be real and believing it to be imaginary. He is unable to choose: his hesitation is marked by blankness, a moment of mental negation in which neither option prevails. He is 'dazed', 'stunned', and 'in a dream' (a borderland moment he cannot resolve), and the chapter ends without his reaching a conclusion. This hesitation is sustained through most of the novel. Although the death of Williams soon proves that the ghost pirates are 'real', the question remains over what sort of real.

At first the *Mortzestus* seems prone to haunting by ghosts or ship spirits. The ghost pirates are characterised by their shadowiness and their refusal to resolve into a clear shape. Jessop's first sighting, a few days before the mist, is of 'a dim, shadowy form' (13). In *Superstitions of Sailors*, Rappoport describes an incident prior to a murder on a ship called the *Pontiac*: a steersman sees 'a strange-looking man, of ghostly appearance', which the mate cannot see (245). This causes some of the crew to believe the ship haunted, portending some calamity; not long after, the murder takes place.

Jessop's early glimpses of 'shadows' about the *Mortzestus* seem at first to suggest a simple story of haunting, but Hodgson's novel is in fact much more complex.

Some of the early mysterious incidents aboard the *Mortzestus* also suggest ship spirits, such as the ship spirit legend of the North and Baltic Seas, known as the Klabautermann. It is mostly a protective spirit, but has a mischievous temper: 'If he is in a bad humour, he makes an awful noise, throws about the fire-wood, spars, and other things, knocks on the ship's sides, destroys many things, hinders those at work, and unseen gives the sailors violent cuffs on the head' (Thorpe *Northern Mythology* Vol. 3 50). The first accident on the *Mortzestus* happens as a loose sail, apparently caught by wind although there is none, 'thrashed right over the after side of the yard, ... knocking Tom clean from off the foot-rope' (*Ghost Pirates* 29). The early incursions of the ghost pirates make them seem like ship spirits. Thorpe records that the Klabautermann is often supposed to take the form of 'a little fellow with yellow breeches, horseman's boots, a large, fiery-red head, green, teeth, and a steeple-crowned hat' (*Northern Mythology* Vol. 3 49), but, like the *Flying Dutchman*, the Klabautermann's form varies. Some of these resemble Jessop's 'shadders' more closely. Sometimes the ship spirit appears as an 'old gray man' or a 'man in gray clothes' (Buss *Klabautermann of the Northern Seas* 44). Reinhard Buss records one 'memorat' of a 'Captain on heavy seas' who 'sees gray man come toward him and jump overboard' (74) (other memorates listed here include dogs who appear and jump overboard, or gray men who speak or simply are seen). Similarly, the ghost pirates are characterised by 'greyness', and Jessop watches as one shadowy figure 'made three quick strides to the port rail, and *climbed over it into the sea*' (*Ghost Pirates* 14, emphasis in text).

Buss also records that the ship spirit is supposed to enter the ship when she is being built, or sometimes when she is launched (39). The Klabautermann is sometimes generated from the wood as the ship is being built (e.g. the first chip hewed, or the last piece used), and sometimes is already present in the wood if it comes from a tree which,

for whatever reason, has a spirit inside it. One version runs as follows: ‘In building a ship, wood was used from a tree which had killed a lumberjack. When the tree was cut into planks, blood could still be seen on them and consequently the Klabautermann has entered the ship’ (Buss 36). This particular story also evokes the vampire-trees of *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’*, which display human faces on their bark and bleed when cut (see Chapter Five). Jessop’s theory that the ship is ‘open’ to the ghost pirates, read in this context, can be understood as the wood of the ship being open to spirits because of the condition of the trees, or the wood, from which it was constructed.

Jessop expounds on a theory of this nature to the apprentice Tammy:

My idea is that this ship is open to be boarded by those things. What they are, of course, I don’t know. They look like men—in lots of ways. But—well, the Lord knows what’s in the seas. I don’t know a bit whether they’re flesh and blood, or whether they’re what we should call ghosts or spirits.

... I believe that this ship is open... exposed, unprotected... it’s reasonable to think that all the things of the material world as barred, as it were, from the immaterial; but that in some cases the barrier may be broken down.

That’s what may have happened to this ship. And if it has, she may be naked to the attacks of beings belonging to some other state of existence.

(49-50)

Jessop is reluctant to accept the ghost pirates as merely ghosts. He knows, as the monsters of *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’* and the living ship of ‘The Derelict’ show, that many strange things can live in the sea. But he does not claim the ghost pirates are simply sea monsters, since he finds the polar options of ‘flesh and blood’ or ‘spirits’ to be inadequate. The ghost pirates are borderland entities from ‘some other state of existence’, and belong to some unknown category of being. Unlike some of his fellow

mariners, Jessop is not a superstitious sailor; he does not refer to any maritime legends, but uses a rhetoric more closely aligned to nineteenth-century spiritualism than eighteenth-century seafaring. William Jones comments on the tendencies of sailors' superstitious minds to conjure up imaginary ghosts, describing two stories: the 'smell' of a ghost turning out to be a dead rat, and the remains of a mast from a wreck resembling a moving figure on the surface of the sea (86-7). Rather than directly rework old sea ghost stories, Hodgson seems to be offering a new myth on new terms of explanation, an alternative premise for the spiritual borderland of the sea.

Tammy, reluctant to accept the ambiguous nature of materiality, wants to understand the invaders as ghosts: 'They can't be flesh and blood. ... they would drown' (50). He presses Jessop to commit to a belief of their being one or the other, but Jessop proposes something else, an alternative, redefined form of realness:

Suppose the earth were inhabited by two kinds of life. We're one and *they're* the other. ... in a normal state we may not be capable of appreciating the *realness* of the other. ... but the more we're like *this*, the more *real* and actual they could grow *to us*. See? That is, the more we should become able to appreciate their form of materialness. (50-51)

For Tammy, this still means 'ghosts, or something of that sort', but Jessop enigmatically concludes, 'I don't think they're our ideas of flesh and blood' (51). Instead, they are neither one thing nor the other, the spectral thing between, the spirit-flesh manifestation of the séance.

The ambiguity over the substance of the ghost pirates deepens as the tale continues. Most of the time, Jessop describes them in terms of haziness and shadows: 'something that looked like a man; but so hazy and unreal, that I could scarcely say I saw anything' (16), 'a dim figure crouching upon the bunt of the royal' (93), and 'something shadowy

at the extreme end of the yard ... the figure of a man... It passed diagonally above Stubbins's head, and reached down a vague hand and arm' (74). However, Jessop gets one close-up glimpse:

I... saw something peering over the taffrail. ...It had eyes that reflected the binnacle light, weirdly, with a frightful, tigerish gleam. ... I seemed frozen. It was so close. ...before the light, it recoiled with a queer, horrible litheness. It slid back, and down, and so out of sight. I have only a confused notion of a wet, glistening something, and two vile eyes. (116)

Perhaps this is a ghost pirate, or perhaps it is something else. It recalls the 'crowding, peering host of sodden souls,/ Staring with fearful orbs' from 'The Place of Storms', perhaps suggesting that the creature is a physical remnant of a drowned soul (19).

The following evening, the ship is invaded by 'a queer, undulating greyness' which 'resolved into hundreds of strange men. In the half-light, they looked unreal and impossible, as though there had come upon us the inhabitants of some fantastic dream-world. My God! I thought I was mad. They swarmed in upon us in a great wave of murderous, living shadows' (*Ghost Pirates*, 127). These ghost pirates, which kill or overpower the crew, set the sails, and take the ship down into the sea, continue to be grey and shadowy; there is no further mention from Jessop of glistening wetness or vile eyes. It is possible that Jessop has encountered some other creature of the sea, which has more in common with the weed-men of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* than with 'the inhabitants of some fantastic dream-world'. However, it is also possible that Jessop has glimpsed a ghost pirate, a 'sodden soul', in its physical form, according to his theory that they should increasingly be able to appreciate each other's materialness, inside the borderland of materiality into which the *Mortzestus* has drifted. For a moment, Jessop sees.

The materiality of the ghost pirates is also suggested by their theft of the ship itself. As Jessop gazes down at the shadow-ship, he has ‘a beastly feeling that there were things swarming down there’ (123). This submarine ‘crew’, once they overpower the *Mortzestus*, sail it down into the sea. The fatal accidents with the loose sails earlier in the story may be seen as early attempts by the ghost pirates to gain control of the ship, before mutual materiality became strong enough. They become sufficiently physically present to manipulate the rigging and directly kill members of the crew. Jessop’s belief that ‘it’s the ship herself that’s the cause of everything’ implies a connection between the ship and the ghost pirates which is supported by the fact that the ship appears to be their goal. If the ghost pirates themselves exist on the fringes of materiality, then perhaps so do their ships, and the *Mortzestus* too.

The ambiguity over material and immaterial life is never resolved one way or the other in *The Ghost Pirates*. The story shifts continually between ghostly and physical presence. Jessop’s theory suggests a place of alternative existence that is neither life nor death, remarking that ‘It can’t be the sort of existence *we* should call life’ (109). For Jessop, however, the answer to this question is relatively unimportant: ‘It strikes me that whether they’re ghosts, or not ghosts, they’re blood-gutted pirates’ (110). Understanding what the ghost pirates are cannot change the disastrous result of their attacks.

Like the ghost pirates, the swine-creatures of *The House on the Borderland* represent a different sort of life to that with which we are familiar. The Recluse tries to determine what will have happened to the swine-creatures now that the pit has filled with water and access to the trap-door is flooded from beneath. He wonders, ‘Were all the creatures drowned? Would they drown? I remembered how unable I had been to find any traces to show that my shooting had really been fatal. Had they life, as we understand life, or were they ghouls?’ (159). *The House on the Borderland* also encourages us to think that the swine-creatures are imaginary, products of the Recluse’s madness. For the Recluse,

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however, they are real enough and he also cannot choose between ‘life’ and ‘ghouls’. Swine-creatures and ghost pirates exist somewhere on the border of material and immaterial life. Not knowing what sort of existence the monsters have prolongs the mystery of the narrative, the fantastic moment of hesitation, and ultimately leaves us with an ambiguous picture through which, like the séance, many possible stories and interpretations can be traced. One way of reading the vanished bodies of the swine-creatures is that, like the ghost pirates, they are only visible in this world when the ‘veil’ is weak (*House* 147).

Unlike *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’*, in which there are many survivors of the adventures and the narrator and the bo’sun can ‘talk softly of the land where God hath made monsters after the fashion of trees’, Jessop is the only survivor (*Boats* 103). His account to the officers of the *Sangier* is the only explanation: ‘no-one except ourselves will ever know how it happened—really. The shellbacks don’t count... No one would think of taking anything they said, as any more than a damned cuffer’ (*Ghost Pirates* 130). Jessop cynically describes the sort of bland entry he expects the captain to record in the log-book and that they would both sign: ‘it was observed that she seemed to be settling by the head, and a minute later she foundered suddenly... picked up one of the men... He was quite unable to give any explanation of the catastrophe’ (130). Left there, Jessop’s story may be seen as about as reliable as that of Poe’s ‘Manuscript’ narrator, and may *all*, for all we know, be fabrication. However, the story’s framing belies this interpretation. Jessop’s story receives nods of ‘silent assent’ from the *Sangier*’s officers, and there is an appendix: ‘a short note of what we saw from our side’ by the third mate, which confirms many essentials of Jessop’s story, and even suggests explicitly that the *Mortzestus* sails in some other reality.

Other than some mist and an ‘indistinct’ view of ‘men going up her side’, the only peculiar quality of the ship is its initial silence. Eventually, reports the third mate,

we began to hear sounds from her; very queer at first, and rather like a phonograph makes when it's getting up speed. Then the sounds came properly from her, and we heard them shouting and yelling ... The next thing I remember, there was a thick mist round the ship; and then all the noise was shut off, as if it were all the other side of a door. (*Ghost Pirates* 132)

The thick mist, perhaps, explains the abrupt silencing; noise resumes from the sinking ship as the stern rises up out of the mist before it goes down. The 'door' image reinforces the suggestion of a glimpse into, or from, another place, and supports Jessop's account of the broken boundary between two dimensions. In *The Great God Pan*, Dr. Raymond describes his experiment on Mary as one in which he 'broke open the door of the house of life, without knowing or caring what might pass forth or enter in' (50). The image of the door, rather than a window, or a hole, for example, implied something capable of being closed as well as opened. The boundaries between the worlds are never universally broken: only Mary, and only the *Mortzestus*, see beyond the veil.

Conclusion

In *The Ghost Pirates*, the boundary between states of reality becomes the boundary between materiality and immateriality. *The Ghost Pirates* brings legends of the sea, especially the multi-faceted legend of the phantom ship, into a modern spiritualist and occult context of other worlds and alternative dimensions. Throughout, Hodgson never loses sight of what might lie beyond the boundary in these borderlands. For Hodgson the sea represents the edge of human experience; it is a fluid and permeable boundary, a fragile barrier between the physical world and a region of unspeakable terrors, ghost pirates, and hellish sea-demons which threaten to overwhelm humanity completely.

The encounter with the other in Hodgson's fiction is therefore presented in the context of these borderlands: between spirituality and materiality, horror and solace, reality and imagination. The division between these states of existence is breached or weakened either by natural law or by human intervention. The horror on the other side is expressed in terms of varying clarity to the human brain, as symbols such as ghosts or demons, or concealed as unspeakable and indescribable: the secrets of the universe must remain beyond comprehension. Texts such as *The Ghost Pirates*, 'The Place of Storms', 'Out of the Storm', and 'From the Tideless Sea' suggest that it is from the experience of the sea that Hodgson derives his conception of the bleak, incomprehensible, and impersonal horror contained in the natural universe, which continually inflects his compulsive explorations of borderlands.

To venture into the borderlands of the sea is to be caught in this boundary. Hodgson's monsters, ghost pirates, and phantom ships occupy an indeterminate position between solidity and immateriality, defying categorisation as either ghosts or flesh, dead or alive. Spiritualist discourse challenged received notions of the division between matter and spirit laid down by scientific materialism. In *The Ghost Pirates*, Hodgson combines this destabilisation with a pre-existing imaginative framework of the sea as a liminal region, revisiting the sailing ship as a fragment detached from earthly laws, transgressing boundaries to offer a glimpse of the horrors of the other world.

Chapter Five

Evolving monsters: conditions of monstrosity in *The Night*

Land and The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’

Monsters are borderline creatures: they dwell on the boundaries of imagination and reality, of shape and form, of matter and spirit like the vile-eyed revenants of *The Ghost Pirates*. They exist on a conceptual or linguistic boundary, too, as unspeakable, unnameable Things. Like the monstrous living ship of Hodgson’s ‘The Derelict’, they can be made of any substance, as long as they have life, and they are shifting, changeable creatures, doing changeable cultural work. In medical terms, the study of monstrosity, or teratology, typically refers to the births of humans or animals with deformities.⁴¹ A monstrous person is characterised by aberrant traits or behaviour, while in myths and fairytales monsters are marvellous creatures of unusual size or configuration. A distinction can be made between a monstrous birth, something that is labelled monstrous according to a social construction, and a literal or imaginary monster such as a kraken. Monsters in fantastic fiction generate an interplay between the second and third of these meanings, while historical attitudes to monstrous births colour this interplay and influence constructions of monstrosity.

Monsters in literature at the Victorian *fin de siècle*, however, are very different creatures from those in the Renaissance or medieval times; their corporeality reflects a ‘peculiarly modern emphasis on the horror of particular kinds of bodies’ (Halberstam 3). The monstrous bodies of vampires, degenerates, and hybrid or unrecognisable

⁴¹ Humans are also animals, of course; however, assuming that this is implicit, for succinctness I will use the distinguishing terms ‘human’ and ‘animal’.

creatures are inscribed with the anxieties generated by contemporary scientific and social discourse. In *fin-de-siècle* Gothic literature, some of the universal characteristics of corporeal monsters are reshaped and redefined according to the cultural preoccupations of the period. The Shorter OED defines a monster firstly as ‘An animal, plant, or other thing, which deviates markedly from the normal type’.⁴² Monstrous deviation, therefore, is defined against constructions of ‘normal’. Deviant monsters, pushed to the cultural fringes and existing on the borders of form and category, are defined against the desirable norms of the late nineteenth century: shape, colour, sexuality, for example.

For Judith Halberstam, monsters are the ‘perfect figure for negative identity. Monsters have to be everything the human is not, and, in producing the negative of human, these novels [*Frankenstein* and *Dracula*] make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual’ (22). If monsters are the ‘negative of human’, they are defined against a normative construction of what it means to be ‘human’. This is not only a specifically gendered and racialised human, but for much *fin-de-siècle* Gothic it is also a specifically *shaped* human, recognisable and unaltered by evolutionary metamorphosis. *Fin-de-siècle* monsters exist in a figurative and literal borderland of identity; they employ a ‘Gothic economy ... a thrifty metaphoricity’ that ‘constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow’ (Halberstam 102). Monsters therefore yield multiple layers of interpretation, occupying an indeterminate position.

⁴² The *Shorter OED* defines the noun ‘monster’ as follows, p. 1829:

1. An animal, plant, or other thing, which deviates markedly from the normal type; *spec.* a congenitally malformed animal, a deformed foetus or neonate.
2. Something extraordinary or unnatural; a prodigy; a marvel. [obsolete]
3. An imaginary creature, usu. of large and of frightening appearance, and often made up of incongruous elements.
4. A person of inhuman and horrible cruelty or wickedness; an atrocious example of evil, a vice, etc.
5. An animal of huge size; anything very large and unwieldy (and freq. also hideous).

In Hodgson's novels and stories, this liminal existence manifests itself in physical as well as metaphorical ways: monsters resist classification, recognition, and description because their bodies belong to multiple categories of identity, and they are found on the borders of our known world, in places or in discourses where they can belong to both reality and fantasy. Hurley argues that 'the monstrosities of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic are monstrous precisely because of their liminality. To be Undead, to be simultaneously human and animal, to shift from one sexed identity to another, is to explode crucial binarisms that lie at the foundations of human identity' (*Gothic Body* 24-5). The monstrous other of the human is not itself a fixed identity; it is not monstrous simply because it displays an alternative sexuality or species, but because of its corporeal potential to shift, change, and evolve.

Nineteenth-century evolutionary theory, itself characterised by its adaptability and its dispersal into a myriad of discourses, influences constructions of monstrosity in various ways: through the potential for degeneration to an earlier form, be it savage, beast, or primeval slime; through the reminder that these lowly states and the undesirable traits accompanying them may still be present in the modern human (as Henry Jekyll and Edward Hyde exemplify); and through the potential for human extinction from the planet and replacement by a fitter species (the iron-based ferromagnetics of J.-H. Rosny aîné's *The Death of the Earth* [1910], for example). Constructing these threatening monsters as abnormal or unnatural, through their ugly appearance, the revulsion they evoke, or their disassociation from the dominant mammalian class, helps to reaffirm normalised human and animal types. It also allows humanity to reassert its place in a world governed, in Huxley's terms, by the indifferent natural law of the cosmic process.

The implications of evolutionary theory generated new forms of literary monsters. Earlier writing relied on the supernatural, mythic, or folkloric to supply objects of fear in the form of organic monsters, but theories of evolution allowed *fin-de-siècle* Gothic

to blur the distinction between reality and imagination in its narratives by placing monsters on the borderline. Wells could create Dr. Moreau's Beast People, for example, because contemporary developments in vivisection, along with the consciousness that the relationship between animals and humans was uncomfortably close, allows them to exist within a scientific-seeming framework and therefore in the realm of almost-real rather than in that of fairytale.⁴³ Moreau describes this speculative borderland: '[T]he possibilities of vivisection do not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis. A pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily' (*Moreau* 112).⁴⁴ Monsters take the possibilities of physical and mental life beyond their usual boundaries: if physical shape can metamorphose, so too can mental capacity.

In *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, evolutionary monstrosity oscillates between understanding monsters as natural and understanding them as unnatural, trying to find a place for monsters within the natural order while still maintaining their distance from the properly human subject. This chapter will focus on this context for the physical, corporeal monstrosity (as opposed to supernatural) appearing in Hodgson's novels and stories. Like the Frankenstein myth proposed by Baldick in *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, these organic creatures are symptoms of a 'natural monster' myth, generated by late nineteenth-century discourse. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* claims that the 'recruitment to the horror story of monsters spawned by Nature' was 'pioneered' by H. G. Wells and William Hope Hodgson, singling out these two authors as progenitors of a new trope, although, as we see, they were not alone (818). Corporeal monsters, then, characterised by their materiality, may be distinguished from supernatural or fantastical monsters.

⁴³ Evolutionary fairytales do exist such as Kingsley's *The Water Babies*. Gothic is perhaps an inverted, distorted fairytale, with particularly gruesome, corporeal fairies.

⁴⁴ This framework allows Wells to introduce more overtly fantastical monsters—the Satyr, the only one of the Beast People directly classifiable from mythology, is 'strangely unreal, for all that he cast a shadow', while the escaped puma flutters loose bandages like a revived mummy (142, 158).

Monsters in Hodgson's fiction generally take one of two forms. They are either organic, physical creatures or things, or as we have seen, they are intended to be natural psychological forces or entities. This chapter will deal almost solely with the first category, especially with its evolutionary context. Hodgson is less concerned with the genesis of individual monstrosities than with species of monsters, fitted by natural selection to their strange land- or seascapes, threatening humanity through their abject form and superior fitness. He also explores the monstrosity of the environment itself, not only the incomprehensible cosmic horror discussed in Chapter Three, but the capability of entire habitats to become monstrously alive, collapsing the boundaries between organic and inorganic matter. Hodgson's representations of monstrosity, like those of his contemporaries, are shaped almost entirely by late nineteenth-century discourses. However, the construction of monsters as 'other', and the theories of their development begin in the Enlightenment.

Constructing monsters: changing historical attitudes and theories

Attitudes to monstrosity, and the fears represented by monsters, change with cultural and historical period. However, some universal attributes persist, relating to the construction of monsters as abnormal, unnatural, or repugnant. If for Aristotle in the fourth century BC, for example, monsters were simply meaningless mistakes 'in the province of nature ... failures to achieve the natural purpose' (Aristotle II.8, 52), then by the early modern period in Europe the deformed progeny of humans or animals had accrued greater significance.

The word 'monster' derives from the Old French *monere*, to warn, from the Latin *monstrum*, a divine portent or warning.⁴⁵ In the mid sixteenth-century, monsters start to be seen as abnormal, marginal, deviating from divine purpose: 'Monsters' in this

⁴⁵ See Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, or Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, for more detailed accounts of the etymology of 'monster'.

formulation were measured against normative standards, which were blessed with the stamp of divine approval' (Burnett 24). Accordingly, monstrous births were assigned superstitious causes. In the Renaissance, says Marie-Hélène Huet, '[m]onsters came from God and the Devil, they were caused by stars and comets, they resulted from copulation with other species and from flaws in their parents' anatomies' (1). Monstrous characteristics in a child or animal might be as trivial as a birthmark, but extended to conjoined twins, babies with deformed, absent, or multiplied limbs, and excessive hairiness, size, or diminutiveness. From the Middle Ages on, such monsters fascinated the public and were exhibited at touring fairs: 'No fairground would have been complete without some kind of exhibition of monsters, whether real or faked, and such exhibitions played a major role in cultivating notions of monstrosity in the popular imagination' (Goodall 15). These exhibitions continued into the nineteenth century, also including fakes such as falsified mermaids, and people who cooperated in their own showcasing; the bearded lady Julia Pastrana was 'the most celebrated Victorian example of this type' (Ritvo 170).

Michael Hagner identifies the Enlightenment as the period during which cultural attitudes to monsters began to change:

It would be an exaggeration to say that monsters were completely unproblematic in the seventeenth century. But that century did demonstrate a relaxed attitude toward monstrosities unknown hitherto. It viewed them mainly as curiosities and sports of nature, as extraordinary products of nature's artfulness. (Hagner 175)

Mid seventeenth-century physicians, however, were already trying to understand and categorise monsters; if 'monstrosity can be tabulated, it can also be identified' (Burnett 24). Monsters began to be constructed as beings that transgress rules. Eighteenth-

century efforts at classification of monsters ‘led to attitudes toward deviation and otherness that constituted the dark side of the Enlightenment and outlasted the age of reason, casting a huge shadow on our modernity’ (Hagner 178). The time for mild curiosity over physical oddities was past; a modern age needed ‘to integrate, incorporate, and domesticate [monsters] in the material and discursive arsenals of enlightened rationality’ (Hagner 178). The effort to regulate monsters is the effort to make them safe, to bring them under control. However,

[t]his enterprise failed because every single monster suggested its own theory and because physico-theologists hesitated to draw the logical conclusions of their incorporation of monsters into the natural order, that is, to ascribe purpose and beauty to monsters. One solution was to put monsters on the dark side of ordered nature: their main purpose was to clarify and strengthen the beauty of regular structures. (Hagner 199-200)

Their unique abnormalities mean that, almost inevitably, monsters become creatures of the borderland, on the margins of the natural order. Monsters are characterised by their ugliness and irregularity, and ‘beauty’ is precisely the sort of subjective construction that changes with time or with culture.⁴⁶

Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein, for example, selects attractive body parts for his creation, but is overwhelmed by its ugliness after he brings it to life:

His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful.

Beautiful!--Great God! Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that

⁴⁶ For Kant, monsters are unique and cannot admit a ‘standard idea’, which is the only route to an ‘archetype of beauty’. Beauty may be judged against monsters, but they cannot be beautiful in themselves; it is only ‘man, alone among all objects in the world, who admits of an ideal of *beauty*’ (*Critique of Judgement* 233, 81); aesthetically, the shape that threatens human beauty is the shape that is the most troubling.

countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. (*Frankenstein* 490-1)

Beauty is a property of the entire form, not the constituent parts, and it is the changeable parts of monsters—the tentacles, beaks, snouts, and claws—that in Hodgson's narratives are combined with human characteristics in worrying hybridisations (for example the beaked, armed, and tentacled weed-men in *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*). The weed-men represent disordered nature, highlighting the orderliness of the human characters they threaten. They also exemplify the persistent problem of identifying and categorising monsters, because they do not fit any known biological pattern. Monsters 'are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions' (Cohen 6). Monsters defy attempts at categorisation and therefore threaten the safety found in normalised patterns and distinctions.

If the Enlightenment began the construction of monsters as 'other', the advance of scientific investigation at least reduced superstitious explanations, although debates over mermaids and sea serpents persisted into the nineteenth century (Ritvo 175). Goodall lists 'Siamese twins, giants, six-legged cows, or humans with tails' amongst the monsters that students around 1830 understood they might see, 'but they need not expect to see flying horses, mermaids, or satyrs' (14). The monsters of fable could mostly be distinguished from the monsters of natural possibility, which were studied and analysed through the new science of 'teratology', coined in 1830 by Isidore Geoffroy Saint Hilaire (Huet 108).

The causes of monstrosity continued to generate debate. In *Philosophical Transactions* (1683-1775), John Hunter proposed a 'living principle' as the force that

defined living matter. Too much of this force, what Denise Gigante calls ‘a troubling overflow’ of the living principle, produced monstrous forms (435). Gigante argues that:

The aesthetic definition of monstrosity changed significantly during this period [1780—1830] from an Enlightenment concept of defect or deformity to a Romantic notion of monstrosity as too much life. ... they become products of the animal’s uncontainable vitality ... For practitioners of the post-Hunterian science of life, monstrosity was not malformed but overexuberant living matter. (434, 437, 438)

The living principle endows monstrosity with active qualities; monsters are creatures with vitality, with the urge to live, as we will see in Hodgson’s ‘The Derelict’.

An alternative, more successful theory explaining monstrous births was epigenesis, which contended that an embryo develops from the differentiation of an originally undifferentiated form: development of a deformed foetus took place during generation and growth, therefore, and was not pre-assigned or affected by external factors. Monstrosity shifted towards the realm of biological, and thus comprehensible, laws. For Hagner,

This was a crucial moment for the temporalization of humans, because human existence was no longer infinitely far away from deformation, disorder, hybrids, and transitory forms. Humans no longer began their existence as perfect creations, but as vulnerable embryos and potential monsters. (Hagner 213-4)

The significance of this shift for the construction of monsters in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic is the suggestion of a lack of distance between the truly human and the truly monstrous.

Compounded by evolutionary theory, the principles of epigenesis would enable Gothic narratives to transform humans into monstrous shapes. It would also influence the construction of moral or social monstrosity, such as criminal or sexual aberration, which in the late Victorian period would often be assigned biological causes. While the direct scientific influences on *fin-de-siècle* Gothic monsters derive more from criminology or anthropology than from Victorian teratology, fiction still finds uses for some of the discarded teratological theories of the Enlightenment.

Monsters in late nineteenth-century Gothic

In the nineteenth century, physical monstrous forms began to take hold in the literary Gothic and the fantastic. By the time of *Frankenstein*, monsters had been established as unclassifiable, transgressive, deviant creatures that reaffirm ‘normal’, while conversely humans had been established as Hagner’s ‘potential monsters’. Yet it took until the 1880s for these themes to emerge as organic, corporeal monsters in Gothic fiction. Until Darwinism provided a scientific validating framework, extremes of literal monstrosity were mostly limited to myth and fantasy.

Halberstam argues that in the nineteenth century, ‘the terrain of Gothic horror shifted from the fear of corrupted aristocracy or clergy, represented by the haunted castle or abbey, to the fear embodied by monstrous bodies’ (16). Gothic expresses itself through contemporary cultural sources of fear, which by the *fin de siècle* focus on organic bodies. In *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, Chris Baldick dismisses the common notion that monsters reveal ‘our deepest fears’, arguing that ‘fears themselves are subject to history’:

Even if there are some deep fears which undergo little historical change, we are still left with the problem of explaining why humanity should have waited until the nineteenth century before revealing them in the form of the

Frankenstein myth.... such readings discard history in favour of perennial
psychic truths. (6)

This suggests that there are specific, historical reasons for the emergence of corporeal monsters in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, which have surprisingly few antecedents in fantastic literature (as distinct from those in *fantasy* literature, myth, or fairytale).⁴⁷ Until the *fin de siècle*, fantastic (and indeed realist) literature of the long nineteenth century, including late eighteenth-century Gothic, contains a host of variously constructed monsters in human shape—for example the demonic Matilda in Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), the devilish Gil-Martin in Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), the aristocratic villains of Ann Radcliffe’s novels, and a smattering of vampires, mummies, authoritarians, witches, lunatics, Jews, and Creoles, in works by writers as various as John Polidori, Jane Webb, Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens.

However, other than Frankenstein’s creation there are apparently no monsters (if one he is) in monstrous shape—certainly none which gripped either a popular or literary imagination with anything like the strength of Edward Hyde or Wells’s Martians.⁴⁸ We are left with very little corporeal monstrosity in the prose tradition, then, between *Frankenstein* and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in 1886. Despite Jekyll’s horror of Hyde as something ‘inorganic’ (69), Hyde has a very physical presence contained in a distinctively monstrous shape: his stunted size, his unspecifiable ‘deformity’, and his several atavistic, beast-like characteristics such as his gnashing teeth. Following Baldick’s argument, waiting until the final decades of the nineteenth century to reveal primal fears in the form of material, bestial monsters, suggests these

⁴⁷ Sphinx, Questing Beast, gryphons, or Baba Yaga’s chicken-legged hut, for example, qualify as myth, fairytale or fantasy, but not Gothic or the fantastic in Todorov’s terms.

⁴⁸ The construction of Frankenstein’s creation as a ‘monster’ is complex. He is artificial by creation and ugly in his creator’s eyes, but his initial innocence and his natural feelings—love for Felix and Safie, desire for Victor’s affection and for a mate, unhappiness and anger at rejection—naturalise and humanise him. Only interaction with humans turns him into a monster driven to monstrous crimes.

monsters have much more to do with the conditions of the time in which they appeared than with the historical anxieties around monstrous births.

The anxieties often cited as circulating in *fin-de-siècle* culture include degeneration, foreign invasion, imperial decline, artistic decadence, and criminality in the modern city, all of which can be seen in the monsters of texts such as *Dracula*, *The War of the Worlds*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Robert Mighall, however, rejects what he calls the ‘anxiety model’ of interpreting Victorian Gothic, arguing that it is a ‘hermeneutic loop’ in which ‘[h]orror fiction is used to demonstrate what the critic already knows about “Victorian culture”’ (108). Mighall argues that the monstrous being is created by nineteenth-century scientific discourse rather than causing it:

if criminals and perverts proliferated at the end of the nineteenth century it was because various discourses were actively producing these ‘monsters’ . . . If these sciences often had recourse to a language of horror they ‘feared’ nothing that they did not also create. . . . If a section of late-Victorian society was ‘anxious’ about the growth of criminals and deviants then criminologists and sexologists were not part of it. (208)

Mighall’s argument does not entirely invalidate the ‘anxiety model’, however: by creating these criminals and deviants, by writing and publishing about them, criminologists and sexologists are nevertheless drawing attention to them. The creation of a new discourse around deviancy is the creation of new conditions that affect the shape of literary monsters at this time. It generates new ideas for Gothic writers to explore in the narrative production of fear, whether or not this reflects the author’s own ‘anxiety’.

Narratives containing outlandish monsters are constrained by the same writing and publishing conditions of the mid-century that constrained other fantastic fiction, and emerge with the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic revival for the same reasons (see Chapter Two). Social and scientific conditions were not right to produce corporeal monsters in the eighteenth-century Gothic texts, and publishing and writing conditions were not right until the *fin de siècle*. In the meantime, monsters follow the rest of the Gothic mode during the nineteenth century and become dispersed, with a few exceptions, into other forms and genres. The monstrous racial other (*Oliver Twist*'s Fagin or *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason), the vampire, the monsters of the Romantic poets (Coleridge's Christabel or Keats' Lamia) are present in realist novels, drama and poetry.

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction notes that the 'actual scientific discipline of teratology (the study of monsters) has made little impact on sf' (and in the context of *fin-de-siècle* monsters we may understand science fiction to comprehend the modern Gothic) (818). *Fin-de-siècle* Gothic narratives find more inspiration in the colourful ideas circulating in the discourse around monstrosity than in the actual science of teratology, and may also draw more clearly on other modern sciences such as criminal anthropology. As a result the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic generally lacks people who are congenitally deformed: no conjoined twins, no hirsute ladies. However, these do appear in other fictions: the disfigured and hunchbacked Quasimodo from Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame* (1931); the legless Miserrimus Dexter in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* (1875); or the dwarf Daniel Quilp in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1).

Instead, the monsters of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic grow from a combination of contemporary constructions of otherness with some of those dating back to the Enlightenment: the affirmation of 'correct' shapes by categorising the 'wrong', for example, and the contribution of epigenesis to the development of evolutionary thought. As Jane Goodall points out:

although the shift to evolutionary interpretations of nature occurred decisively during Darwin's lifetime, and in the name of Darwin, he was not the only or the first evolutionist. ... The idea that the natural order was not stable, and more specifically that organic forms were subject to change through interaction with their environment, dated back at least to the eighteenth century. (3)

From this point on, humanity, as part of the natural order, was beginning to be understood as a potentially unstable form, no less affected by changes in their environment than other 'organic forms'.

However, Gothic monsters are not simply an exaggeration of the potential for human monstrosity enabled by Darwinism. When, in 1933, Richard Goldschmitt used the term 'hopeful monster', he was expressing 'the idea that mutants producing monstrosities may have played a considerable role in macroevolution. A monstrosity appearing in a single genetic step might permit the occupation of a new environmental niche and thus produce a new type in one step' (390). Darwin's later thinking, after *The Origin of Species*, dismissed the evolutionary possibilities of monstrous births, 'treating them rather as single characteristics, analogous to unusual coloration, than as transforming or defining systemic anomalies' (Ritvo 144). Yet *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, instead of rendering a monster as something unfit, often depicts it as something un-human, or un-animal, or unknown, or unrecognisable.

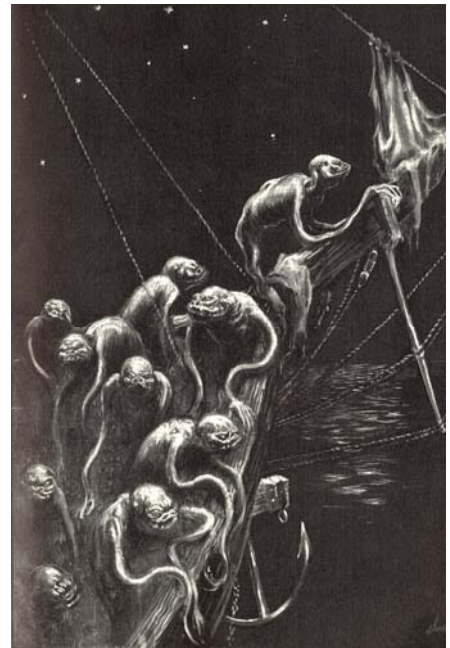
Hodgson's monsters, his devil-fishes or Night Hounds, tend (although not exclusively) to be *species*, not individuals; in evolutionary terms they are successful, monsters fit to survive in monstrous environments. In Hodgson's stories, it is the human characters who are unsuited to the environment in which they find themselves, and are threatened, both literally and figuratively, by well-adapted creatures. The denizens of the Sargasso Sea, such as the seal-bodied, human-faced, be-tentacled aggressors of

'Demons of the Sea', attack and eat sailors whenever possible, and their hybridity manifests a symbolic threat to human identity.

During the Enlightenment monsters changed from being simply curious mistakes of nature to being also deviants of nature. In late nineteenth-century medicine, a monstrous body might continue to be both those things, but it cannot escape also being inscribed with the post-Darwinian fear of humans

evolving towards the monstrous. In *fin-de-siècle* fictions, the monster is never a simple mistake: it is

a product of evolution (the giant-handed head of 'Man of the Year Million'); it represents the fear of regression to primeval slime (the death of Helen Vaughan); it is a product of degeneracy in the modern world (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*); or it is the usurper of human supremacy (the monsters of *The Night Land*).



Artwork for 'Demons of the Sea' in *Terrors of the Sea*
© Ned Dameron, 1996

Evolutionary borderlands: natural species and abominable monsters

For Gothic fiction, the scientific framework of evolutionary theory permitted a virtually unlimited range of bodily forms; it 'posited the essential mutability of bodies, and the theory of natural selection seemed to show that any morphic transmutation was possible, given time, chance, and species variability' (Hurley 'Modernist Abominations' 133). Hodgson fills his narratives with everything from anthropophagous trees and giant cuttle-fish to dinosaurs spawned by swamps of the far future, as well as a range of things so bizarre they defy description. Human and animal species are merged in a limitless series of Gothic forms: the creatures of 'Demons of the Sea' with their snaky feelers, human hands, and talons; the beast-men and bird-monsters in *The Night Land*;

and the swine creatures of *The House on the Borderland* with their ‘grotesquely human mouth and jaw’, recalling the swine folk of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (House 127).

This sort of evolutionary premise gives Hodgson’s fantastic narratives a particular freedom. The Sargasso Sea is an imagined, liminal region which has little narrative purpose other than to be an area for playing out human fears over species identity, and so its products are designed to be particularly repulsive, aggressive, and terrifying to humans. Hodgson’s narratives are anthropocentric, displaying what is almost paranoia about the sanctity of the human form. On one level the monsters are merely projections, manifestations, or symbols of human fears, yet the evolutionary framework, the possibility that they *could* exist, despite their monstrosity, if they had evolved to suit the environment, lends the text its fantastic hesitation and lifts it from the realm of mere fairytale.

However, if evolutionism authenticates natural monsters, then they embody a paradox. We have seen, typically, that monsters deviate from the normal type. Evolutionary monsters, however, obey rather than defy a natural system (natural selection), yet still seem monstrous. Their own species defines its normal type, but as a whole they deviate from ‘normal’ animal and human species; it is this species deviation with which Hodgson’s stories are preoccupied. His human characters define a subjective monstrosity contained in things that are unrecognisable, that deviate from laws or patterns known to human science. ‘[S]uppose,’ argues the narrator of Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies* (1863),

that no human being had ever seen or heard of an elephant People would surely have said, ‘Nonsense; your elephant is contrary to nature.’ They would tell you, the more they knew of science, ‘Your elephant is an impossible monster, contrary to the laws of comparative anatomy, as far as yet known’. (48-9)

Van Helsing uses the same argument in *Dracula* to convince Seward of the possibility of vampires: 'there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are' (229). In *The Water Babies* the elephant is used to emphasise a construction of monstrosity out of unfamiliarity, flouting boundaries of known natural laws rather than of individual form and shape.

Nineteenth-century travel, the opening up of new areas of the globe through exploration and empire-building, allowed access to new, unfamiliar lands—Australia, Africa, the Poles—lands which potentially would produce their own strange species. The unfamiliarity of both animals and peoples of these lands led at times to a construction of difference as monstrous: a construction affecting both British imperialist attitudes to 'primitive' races and cultural practices, and the reception of native peoples and colonial products in Britain.⁴⁹ Harriet Ritvo describes the reaction to the discovery of the first platypus, for example, which generated both scepticism and interest because of its violation of recognised mammalian structures. Its 'oddity was not confined to the merely physical but extended to the level of theory or system. The indigenous mammals of the southern continent seemed to have been designed according to a plan different from those that shaped the animals of the rest of the globe' (Ritvo 6). These creatures appeared monstrous because of their strangeness, but nevertheless they were acknowledged to belong to a system, a system itself monstrous in its bizarreness.

A species, therefore, may appear monstrous if as a whole it seems to deviate from some of the rules by which species are understood, even if it does not violate the principles of evolution itself. Hodgson's weed-men of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*,

⁴⁹In *Rule of Darkness*, Patrick Brantlinger describes the late nineteenth-century construction of Africa as 'a centre of evil, a part of the world possessed by a demonic darkness or barbarism' (179). Africans were often seen as animals 'suited only for manual labor', and as savages and monstrous cannibals (183). The Anthropological Society 'held that the Negro race probably formed a distinct species' (185), and such constructions served to distance civilised white Europeans from the savage and primitive 'other'.

like the platypus, suggest a new system, one which has shaped the indigenous creatures of the Sargasso Sea. They blend beaks, arms, and tentacles in such a way that they are unclassifiable, yet resemble humans closely enough to generate the most profound horror (Hurley *Gothic Body* 23). These species, though naturally evolved according to evolutionary principles, are abominated as monstrosities, and for this there are several reasons, including *fin-de-siècle* attitudes to degenerate bodies, and constructions of the other, of difference, as evil.

Monstrous physiognomy and abomination

Degeneracy, in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, is suggested through atavistic or deviant characteristics: criminality for Dracula, for example, a ‘Troglodytic’ appearance for Hyde. Atavism is a form of deviancy, and deviancy, as we have seen, creates monstrosity. ‘The concept of evil,’ Rosemary Jackson argues,

which is usually attached to the other, is relative, transforming with shifts in cultural fears and values. Any social structure tends to exclude as ‘evil’ anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction, and this conceptualization, this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture. (52)

The differences that are named as evil in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic include many of the atavistic aberrations manifest in the degenerate bodies of monsters. The other characters in the narratives identify themselves with the antithesis of the monstrous character, and their typical loathing of the monster is part of this subjective identification. Since beauty is equated with regularity, the ‘different’ corporeal forms of monsters render them ugly, often visibly so, although some, like Helen Vaughan of *The Great God Pan* and Arabella March of Stoker’s *The Lair of the White Worm*, conceal their twisted desires

under an outward allure. Mighall notes that in Gothic novels the ‘use of physiognomic registers is pronounced’ because their characters embody emotional extremes (174). Edward Hyde, for example, gives Enfield ‘a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point I can’t describe him’ (Stevenson 10). The sense of deformity given off by Hyde is not only meant to be literal but reflects his innate nature as the bad portion of Jekyll, condensed and unadulterated by any goodness. Gothic texts use the opposition of beauty and ugliness to explore representations of deviancy and otherness, producing creatures through which the double relationship between external appearance and internal nature can be variously played out.

Discussing *Frankenstein*, Halberstam argues that

The opposition between crime and vice is extremely important to an examination of Gothic monstrosity. Frankenstein’s monster argues that his ‘vices are the children of a forced solitude’ but Victor thinks his monster, by virtue of his filthy form, was made to sin. Indeed, the equivocation between these two positions is unique to *Frankenstein* for, in the Gothic novel at the end of the nineteenth century, monsters are always born bad. (43-44)

Frankenstein’s creature is born *from* bad, the product of Victor’s transgressions. Dracula and Hyde, for Halberstam, are ‘born bad’, suggesting that something cannot be not a monster if it is not bad. However, even Hyde and Dracula are only following their natural impulses; the case of Frankenstein’s creature, constantly judged on his looks, establishes that the ‘badness’ of a monster is a matter of perspective.

Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* explores the relationship between monstrous insides and outsides. Prendick remarks on the Beast People’s monstrous appearance, ‘yet—so relative is our idea of grace—my eyes became habituated to their forms, and at

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last I even fell in with their persuasion that my own long thighs were ungainly' (130). The shift in Prendick's perspective both signals his own innate bestiality and undermines the construction of monstrosity based on appearance. The Beast People may blend human and animal characteristics hideously, but they are also victims. The Leopard Man crouches with 'a perfectly animal attitude' and an 'imperfectly human face distorted with terror' causing Prendick to shoot him rather than let him suffer vivisection again at Moreau's hands (150-1). Prendick abhors the Beast People, but also pities them: 'Poor brutes! I began to see the viler aspect of Moreau's cruelty' (153). The true 'monster' is arguably Moreau himself, or humanity as a whole, since Prendick begins to discern monstrous appearance, his 'ungainly thighs', in himself.

Most of Hodgson's monsters are characterised by their deviation from normalised human and animal shapes, and their difference is named as evil. Our response to the monsters as bad, or repugnant, or harmless, is entirely shaped by the responses of the narrators, and their representative physiognomy is entirely represented through the narrators' eyes. The swine-creatures fill the Recluse of *The House on the Borderland* with revulsion; he claims 'an almost instinctive knowledge that the creature was something different from the brute-beast... something foul and hostile to the *great* and *good* in humanity' (132). The fungus-man, originally human, of 'The Voice in the Night' is horrible but not evil, however, while the weed-men of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* are 'vile' and 'abominable', and their human-like arms divide into 'hateful' tentacles (30, 69). Their monstrosity is constructed out of a combination of their corporeal form, including smell and texture, and their perceived threat to humans.

Yet whether monsters of the Sargasso Sea, preying like spiders on whatever becomes trapped in their web of weed, can be called 'bad' depends on how we read the text. We can read the Sargasso Sea purely as a site for the struggle of survival of the fittest. Darwin noted that the 'competition will generally be most severe... between the forms which are most like each other in all respects' (*Origin* 259). Human-like

monsters, therefore, threaten extinction because they are better adapted to the environment than humans, and their hostility is therefore based on competition. However, we can also read the land- and seascapes of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* as 'scapes of the psyche in which the monsters exist solely to threaten humans, regardless of their own ontology. Or we can see the construction of the monsters as purposefully malign, reacting to the *human* presence particularly, as an attempt by the narrative to reaffirm a crumbling anthropocentricity in a world dominated by other species.

In *The Night Land*, some monsters are figured as abominable and others as natural animals, indifferent to humans just as humans are indifferent to them. On his travels, X discovers a 'Country of Fire and Water' in which forests grow and natural animals live (247), which points to the cyclic nature of environmental apocalypse and restoration, reproducing 'olden Monsters' that might once have been extinct, and creating new species fit for the new environment. On the return journey through this Country, X and Naani observe 'a great beast to come up lumbbersome out of the sea on to the shore, and there did eat and browse upon the herbage'. This herbivore, somewhere between a hippopotamus and a dinosaur, seems to be still evolving, leaving the sea to forage on land. It 'did seem unto us a natural thing; and nowise to have an odour of aught monstrous to trouble our spirits' (520). X's emphasis on its harmless naturalness highlights the distinction made by *The Night Land* between the lingering regenerative potential of the sunless world and the threat of human extinction posted by monsters and abominable mutations.

The Country of Fire and Water has also evolved the Humped Men who carry stones as tools, identified by X as 'primal man'—'crude and dangerous' but nevertheless 'truly a man' (*Night Land* 238). The Humped Men are different from, for example, the 'utter monstrous' elephant-sized men which have 'the speech of Men' but 'the eyes of animals' (161, 163); a borderland blend of human and animal is abject and horrible, but a primitive man is acceptable. Hurley observes that in *The Night Land* the 'degenerate

body is abominable; but the “progressively” evolving body—though it signify admixture and fluctuation—is “natural” (‘Modernist Abominations’ 146). With characteristic ambivalence, *The Night Land* allows for the coexistence of multiple interpretations of monsters. Some are evil and concomitantly hostile to humans, with their physiognomy registering their innate horribleness, and some are natural, harmless and indifferent to humans, defined as monstrous only by external shape.

In *The Night Land*, the existence of abominable monsters alongside the natural creatures produced by regenerative evolution can be explained firstly by the breach in the ‘Barrier of Life’ (the boundary of our known, living world) through which ‘Monsters and Ab-human creatures’ were able to pass (44). Secondly, the interbreeding of degenerate humans and other species, in the days before the Great Redoubt was built to house the ‘proper’ humans, has contaminated evolutionary progress of these species from then on. The Humped Men, however, are not the products of human degeneration or breeding with monsters. Instead, they are the product of an endless and infinitely resourceful evolutionary process.

In the Sargasso Sea stories, however, neither of these circumstances exist. We must suppose that the monsters are entirely evolutionary, ‘hopeful’ or gradually naturally selected, yet again some are abominable and some are natural. The answer seems to be one of shape and recognition. If they are simply a giant version of something known, like the devil-fish of *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’* (identified as a giant cuttle-fish) and the giant sea-lice of ‘The Derelict’, then they are acceptable, even if, like the devil-fish, they attack human ships. The devil-fish is accompanied by neither a foul smell nor the ‘sense’ of morbid fear that usually strikes Winterstraw (the young gentleman narrator of *Boats*) during monstrous encounters, which is perhaps connected to the fact that the sailors know what it is. The devil-fish, the ‘great cuttle-fish’ is a thing with a name, identifiable and describable in recognisable terms of representation. It is terrible, but not abominable; it does not contravene known zoological taxonomy.

The weed-men, however, with their borderline shapes and habits, are certainly abominable, unclassifiable and chaotic. Their unnatural monstrosity is further underscored by their vampiric tendencies, as they ghoulishly raid a sailor's grave and steal the body: 'the monsters had dugged down to the poor lad's body, and of it we could discover no sign. ... we knew them now to be foul ghouls who could not even let the dead body rest in the grave' (*Boats* 75). During the day the sailors can work safely, because the creatures only come out at dusk, like ordinary vampires. After Winterstraw awakes from his slimy dream, he finds on his throat 'a slight swelled place a little to one side of the wind-pipe, the sort of place that the bite of a mosquito will make; but I had no thought to blame any mosquito.' His blood-sucking attackers have left 'a number of small ring-like marks, red inwardly, and white at the edges, and one of them was bleeding slightly' (39). The ring-shapes recall octopus suckers; these are not vampires of superstition and the supernatural, they are natural, marine-dwelling vampires that have evolved through a process of adaptation to their unusual environment. They are presented as both a real horror and as an example of the profusion of abominable bodily configurations made possible by evolution.

Monsters are abominable if they dare to violate the human body, either by eating it (like the carnivorous ship in 'The Derelict'), vamping or sliming it (like the weed-men), or by problematising it within their own shape. In *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, Hodgson's natural world

teems with abominations. ... The mariners drift through a gothicized Nature ... moving at random, they encounter one abomination after another, and are racked with horror and nausea. The novel does not seek to infuse these abominations with meaningfulness ... they simply *exist*, the disgusting products of a natural world both chaotic and fertile in expedient.

The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig', that is, makes no attempt to contain the

disorderly natural world it describes; its narrative structure is rather such as can elaborate that disorder with as much variety and detail as possible.

(Hurley *Gothic Body* 158–9)

Hurley argues that in its gratuitous gothicness the novel means nothing more than meaninglessness itself. At the same time, these disorderly monsters work to destabilise anthropocentricity, usurping or threatening human supremacy by being better fitted to the hostile or changed environment than are humans.

‘Dominant species,’ Darwin explained, ‘spreading from any region might encounter still more dominant species, and then their triumphant course, or even their existence, would cease’ (*Origin* 263). In Hodgson’s Sargasso Sea mythos, as humans sail around the globe their ‘triumphant course’ grinds to a weedy halt in the Sargasso’s tideless grip; their course literally ceases and in many cases death soon follows their encounter with the dominant species of the Sargasso, ‘a place where monsters of the deep and the weed have undisputed reign’ (‘From the Tideless Sea’ 82). ‘[I]t would be well for man to remember,’ counselled Wells in 1891, ‘that his family *was* driven from the waters by the fishes, who still—in spite of incidental fish-hooks, seines and dredges—hold that empire triumphantly against him’ (‘Zoological Retrogression’ 167). Wells comments ironically on the construction of ‘false analogies between animal and cultural worlds’ by people like Lankester through their use of evolutionary rhetoric (Smith *Victorian Demons* 26). However, this simplistic encapsulation of the evolutionary narrative is nevertheless played out in late nineteenth century Gothic through the struggle between humans and evolutionary monsters. Hodgson’s Sargasso Sea stories repeatedly enact the struggle for existence in the space of a few pages; sometimes the humans are consumed, sometimes they escape—but they never win. The Sargasso is a borderland in which two struggling species clash and evolutionary success is the preserve of the adaptable monster.

‘Melted together’: nameless things and the borders of the body

According to Hurley, ‘Evolutionism, criminal anthropology, degeneration theory, sexology, pre-Freudian psychology—all articulated new models of the human as abhuman, as bodily ambiguated or otherwise discontinuous in identity’ (*Gothic Body* 5). The ‘abhuman’, a term Hurley adopts from Hodgson, is other, retaining enough human resemblance to represent the loss, even the process of loss, of human bodily integrity. The abhuman subject reminds us of our own fragile self, vulnerable to mutability, engaging in an abject struggle with ‘the inescapable fact of its own materiality’ (*Gothic Body* 11). The abhuman is monstrous: its chaotic, excessive, and irregular body is an abhorrent reminder of humanity’s animal origins, potential for change, and bodily physicality. Abjection, theorised by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, is an ambivalent state of simultaneous rejection and welcome of the breakdown of the self, characterised by both desire and repugnance. It is caused by ‘what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite’ (Kristeva 4). Abjection, then, can be seen as a liminal, borderland position, illustrating the anxiety of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic over human bodily integrity.

The abhuman is abominated, yet populates Gothic texts abundantly, rejected but fascinating. As we have seen in *The Great God Pan*, the shape of the dying Helen Vaughan slips from human to animal to shapelessness, moving in and out of unrecognisable categories that evoke her abhuman origin as the product of an abnormal psychic union. Hodgson’s abhuman monsters, however, keep to their own bizarre shapes. While Helen comprises many monstrous forms in a single body, Hodgson offers monsters one at a time across many bodies, moving across hostile ecosystems of land and sea abundantly populated with an extraordinary range of creatures. ‘The abject confronts us,’ Kristeva says, ‘...with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*’ (12). The boundary between human and animal, therefore, is one

of the 'in-between' states where abjection lurks. On this boundary live Hodgson's natural monsters, enabled by natural law (natural selection), but still constructed as abject, monstrous, and other.

The weed-men, for example, in Winterstraw's eyes, resemble 'naked humans' more closely than any other animal. He learns to attack each creature 'before ever it could get upon its hind parts, in which position I had learned greatly to dread them' (*Boats* 72). They are most awful, as well as most deadly, when they are upright and therefore most like humans. Winterstraw sees his very first weed-man while they are still on their way to the island, over the side of the boat, a horrible reflection: 'the human subject discovers its own monstrous similitude ... a sort of abhuman *doppelgänger* looking back at him from within the depths of the weed' (Hurley 'Modernist Abominations' 135). In their distortion of human identity, the weed-men are an abominable emblem of the morphyic potential inscribed in the human body by evolutionary theory: degenerate, abhorrent, animalistic.⁵⁰

Abhuman bodies register an abject identification in the human observer through their similarity to the human body. However, other bodies defy any such recognition. In *Fantasy*, Rosemary Jackson discusses a quotation from Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1959):

⁵⁰ The weed-men strikingly resemble the Morlocks of *The Time Machine*, similarly inspiring disgust and hatred. The Time Traveller, like Winterstraw beslimed in his sleep and awakening to the sense that something had just left him, dreams that 'sea-anemones were feeling over my face with their soft palps' and awakes 'with an odd fancy that some greyish animal had just rushed out of the chamber'. His first glimpses of Morlocks are of indistinct 'white figures... creatures of the half-light' (*Time Machine* 34); Winterstraw sees 'a number of white shapes melt[ing] swiftly into the shadows' as the sailors try to pursue the weed-men (*Boats* 46).

The weed-men (and the demons of the sea) can also be seen as distorted mermen, which read like distorted humans; in William Jones's *Credulities Past and Present* (1880), a merman caught by sailors was said to be 'like a man about the neck, head, face, nose, and mouth, with the exception of the head being very much elevated and pointed toward the top. Its shoulders were broad, and at their extremity were two stumps of arms without hands. The body was slender below, and its look was chilling' (25).
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‘There could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names’—is an expression of a severance of connecting lines of meaning, a severance given graphic form in many fantasies. A gap between signifier and signified works both ways in the modern fantastic. On the one hand, there is a presentation of ‘nameless things’. In nineteenth-century tales of fantasy and horror ... there is an apprehension of something unnameable: the ‘It’, the ‘He’, the ‘thing’, the ‘something’, which can have no adequate articulation except through suggestion and implication. (39)

In Hodgson’s stories, the fear of becoming abhuman is expressed through chaotic bodily forms, abominable and unspeakable, fused by nothing so effectively as the texts’ propensity to label unidentifiable bodies as ‘things’.⁵¹

For Hurley, a ‘thing’ is ‘an abhuman identity for which there is as yet no language... the rhetoric of Thing-ness is deployed to signal the loss of human specificity, the becoming-abhuman of the human body’ (*Gothic Body* 30). Hurley illustrates ‘Thing-ness’ with Hodgson’s short story, ‘The Voice in the Night’, in which, one night at sea, a sailor listens to an unseen castaway recount his story of being gradually assimilated by a strange fungus on a remote island. The story ends as follows:

Indistinctly I saw something nodding between the oars. I thought of a sponge—a great, grey nodding sponge—The oars continued to ply. They were grey—as was the boat—and my eyes searched a moment vainly for the conjunction of hand and oar. ... Then the oars were dipped, the boat

⁵¹ Terry Pratchett, who as a boy read Hodgson, sums up both Thing-ness and the ruptured boundaries of reality in the fantastic with his monstrous alternative universe, the Dungeon Dimensions, which occasionally intrudes into the universe of Discworld. ‘The last trial of magic has been too much for the tortured fabric of reality,’ runs Rincewind’s internal dialogue in *Sourcery*, shortly before he is trapped on the wrong side. ‘It has opened a hole. I am in the Dungeon Dimensions. And the things in front of me are ... the Things’ (250).

shot out of the patch of light, and the—the thing went nodding into the mist. ('Voice in the Night' 121)

Hurley argues that here 'the break in the sentence signals a rupture of conceptual systems, a gap wherein identify formations have lost their meaningfulness. Within this rupture, where lies an abhuman identity for which there is as yet no language, is inserted the word "Thing"' (*Gothic Body* 30). The 'thing', then, is the unspeakable, the unidentifiable, revealing or detecting the loss of specificity of the human shape.⁵²

The fantastic, Rosemary Jackson writes, 'pushes towards an area of non-signification... the gap between signifier and signified dramatizes the impossibility of arriving at definitive meaning, or absolute "reality"' (41). Monstrous things exist in a linguistic borderland too, in the gap between signifier and signified. In Hodgson's stories the descriptions of 'things' may be seen as a series of redeployed signifiers. In the 'Land of Lonesomeness' episode of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* (the first five chapters), the characters encounter what at first seems to be a series of different monsters. They take refuge on the hull of a derelict ship, in which they find food and shelter. As dusk falls, they hear the wailing of 'some weariful, unseen thing' and during the night spent sealed in the main cabin they hear something 'fumbling' around the deck 'as though a great wet cloth were being rubbed everywhere across the floor and bulkheads' (10, 11). This incongruous domestic image is the nearest language can come to describing this unspeakably horrible monster. The bats and vampires, with which Winterstraw tormented his imagination at the sound of the wailing, seem tame in comparison. Consequently Winterstraw spends the following day in fear of 'IT', the giant, capitalised Thing to which he cannot put a name.

⁵² Baldick notes that 'there is some uncertainty [how] best to define the being created by Victor Frankenstein' and he adds a footnote showing "'monster", with 27 appearances, to have won by a short head from "fiend" (25), followed by "daemon" (18), "creature" (16), "wretch" (15), and "devil" (8)' (10). The text labels the creature as 'Thing' only three times, as does Shelley's preface to the 1930 edition another three times.

Gradually, hints about the cloth-monster accrue. The following night the monster attacks again. At the window appears

a reddish mass, which plunged up against it, sucking upon it... Josh, who was nearest to the table, caught up the candle, and held it towards the Thing; thus I saw that it had the appearance of a many-flapped thing shaped as it might be, out of raw beef—*but it was alive*. (15)

The images of ‘flaps’ and ‘raw beef’ provide no clear sense of the monster’s *shape*, but give us a moment of superlative terror, of uncertainty and hesitation. The text itself begins to break down under the bombardment of interpretation offered by that glimpse in the candlelight: a moving object; a piece of dead meat; a living creature; a Thing. As we will see in ‘The Derelict’, the horror of these creatures is contained in the fact of their life, life that should not be: monstrous, abnormal, borderland life.

When Winterstraw and the bo’sun make their closer inspection of the tree-monsters, we no longer dismiss Winterstraw’s imagined fears of vampires, for the irony is that the tree-monsters *are* a type of vampire. They are haemophagous plants, consuming humans and filled with their blood; the ‘raw beef’ of the attack on the cabin is thus revealed. However, like Wells’s blood-injecting Martians, the tree-monsters are worse than ordinary supernatural vampires because they are materially real. In ‘The Haunted “Pampero”’, the ship *Pampero* rescues a castaway who turns out to be a sort of were-shark, blending the natural everyday subject, the tree or the shark, with the unnatural, the vampire or the ghoul, to form an unknown ‘thing’.

Towards the end of the Land of Lonesomeness episode, the encounter with the human-faced tree-monsters makes the bo’sun cry out ‘at the strangeness of the thing’ (*Boats* 19). ‘The thing’ could equally refer to the thing in the tree, or the very fact that the thing is in the tree. It could mean the whole ‘thing’ of the Land of Lonesomeness,

from the wailing to the monstrous cloth to the carnivorous trees, or the 'thing' of being in a world in which the normal rules of natural life no longer seem to apply, where the whole environment is strange and wrong. The text can no longer find language to interpret or articulate the events or monsters in the narrative. 'The strangeness of the thing' summarises a novel in which unspeakable abominations, like the horrors of the world beyond the veil, repeatedly defy even the fundamentals of comprehension.

Hurley argues that 'nothing can illustrate the Thing-ness of the human body so well as its sliminess', which represents 'the revenge of matter'; it 'testifies to the inability of human classificatory systems to contain and master matter... a reminder of the utter Thing-ness of matter' (*Gothic Body* 34, 36). Slime is disgusting to the point of sickness. The climatic attack by the slug-like weed-men renders Winterstraw 'sick with loathing and apprehension' (*Boats* 70), and he struggles to articulate this sensation:

it is scarcely possible to convey the extraordinary disgust which the sight of these human slugs bred in me; nor, could I, do I think I would; for were I successful, then would others be like to retch even as I did, the spasm coming on without premonition, and born of very horror. (70)

Winterstraw intensifies his point by not only admitting himself unable to describe his disgust, but unwilling. As Hurley remarks, 'to make us nauseous, nausea must first be represented' (*Gothic Body* 45), and Winterstraw struggles to convey an experience on the cusp of human appreciation, something that humans are perhaps simply not meant to be able to deal with. Slime disgusts because of its abject violation of the boundaries of the body, because of the fear of becoming abhuman, becoming abject matter through physical contact with it, a reminder of the thinness and porosity of the boundary dividing human and animal.

In 1837 Darwin wrote in his notebook:

If we choose to let conjecture run wild, then animals, our fellow brethren in pain, disease, death, suffering and famine—our slaves in the most laborious works, our companions in our amusements—they may partake [of?] our origin in one common ancestor—we may be all melted together.⁵³ (*Life and Letters* 6)

Evolutionary theory posited a common origin for humans and other animals, suggesting a kinship that still existed. If humans had emerged from primal slime and evolved from beasts, and if evolution was a perpetually continuous, gradual process, then it was impossible to say whether evolution away from the beasts was complete, or indeed possible. The slowness of natural selection renders the boundaries between one species and its ancestors imprecise; the moment of change or difference cannot be pinpointed. The animal nature of humans might still exist within us, as *The Island of Dr. Moreau* dramatises; it might not yet have been refined out.

Darwin's picture of animal shapes melted together suggests collapse of the limits of not only human but all species identity. Monsters enact fears of the loss of human identity by breaching human and animal divisions, existing in a borderland where identify and form overlap. Moreau's attempt to manufacture human identity, for example, conversely undoes it. He makes his Leopard Man and Fox-Bear woman resemble humans, while the human characters, especially Prendick who acquires an animal 'brightness' to his eyes, grow to resemble animals. Hodgson's hybrids, however, are natural rather than artificial products, although in them all sorts of species are similarly admixed. Hurley argues that '[t]he "natural order" emerges as a disorder,

⁵³ In *Darwin's Notebooks* Paul H. Barrett *et al* transcribe as 'netted' the word *Life and Letters* interprets as 'melted'; however, I have chosen 'melted' on the grounds that it is more consistent with the sense of the whole quotation (Darwin *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836-1844* 229).

exceeding the human ordering systems (such as natural history's classification of organic life by species) designed to contain it. Structure itself—for the creatures are complex, highly structured entities—is revealed as a chaos' (*Gothic Body* 25). The weed-men's combination of parts renders them well fitted to survive in the water, weed, and island of the Sargasso Sea; they move between these borderland environments with ease while the humans are vulnerable on land and vulnerable in the water. Evolution by natural selection lacks any purpose except survival. It emphasises the role of chance: the filling of niches through chance mutation, the survival of the fittest to whatever chances to be the prevailing conditions.

Excesses of the life force: Animal Fire and living landscapes

Between the exuberant life of Romantic monstrosity and the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic lies the development of evolutionism. In the 1830s Saint Hilaire

described the monster not in relation to what could have produced it, but in relation to its internal teleology; not in relation to its *cause* but with a view to its *function*. The monster is that which is incapable of performing certain functions, one of the most important of which is reproduction. (Huet 108)

Saint Hilaire's monster is a sterile creature. In contrast, Darwin, despite his later dismissal, 'pointed out in his early notebooks, [that] far from being inevitably sterile, the "most monstrous form has a tendency to propagate, as well as diseases"' (quoted in Ritvo 143). In the 1890s Huxley observed the tendency of monstrous variations, mutations such as six-fingeredness, to perpetuate themselves over several generations before dying out ('The Causes of the Phenomena of Organic Nature' 406-8). Here Darwin and Huxley characterise the monstrous as more vital and more tenacious than the human. This tenacity partly led Goldschmitt to speculate that his hopeful monsters

could, were the conditions favourable, evolve more rapidly than a gradually perfecting human species. Hodgson's monsters are evolutionary mutations rather than Romantic deformities, reproducing to forming monstrous species, following the rule of survival of the fittest.

This construction of monsters as energetic and lively, impelled by a living principle, resonates with the materiality and vitality of fantastic and Gothic creations. Gillian Beer writes that 'hyperactivity authenticated the fantastic', suggesting a ready link between the Gothic and the liveliness of natural life (23). Fred Botting considers Gothic 'a writing of excess' in which '[n]ature, wild and untameable, was as much within as without. Excess emanated from within, from hidden, pathological motivations that rationality was powerless to control' (*Gothic* 1, 12). Gothic life, therefore, like Gigante's 'overexuberant living matter', quoted earlier, must be life to excess. We may see Frankenstein's creature as 'too much life'; he is life where life should not be, since Victor has created his own 'living principle' artificially, and at eight feet tall the creature is, literally, larger than life.⁵⁴

Towards the end of the century excessive life becomes prolific in the Gothic. Haggard's Gagool and Ayesha, for example, have lived disproportionately long lives: Gagool, it is implied, has lived for 'ten generations', and Ayesha for two thousand years (*King Solomon's Mines* 253; *She* 156). Helen Vaughan's destruction is long and difficult; despite her extraordinary range of dying shapes, the 'principle of life, which

⁵⁴ In *Through the Looking Glass* Alice is constructed as fictitious and monstrous by the Unicorn:

'What—is—this?' he said at last.

'This is a child!' Haigha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her, and spreading out both his hands towards her in an Anglo-Saxon attitude.

'We only found it to-day. It's as large as life, and twice as natural!'

'I always thought they were fabulous monsters!' said the Unicorn. 'Is it alive?' (Carroll 348)

Carroll's joke about the 'discovery' of the 'Monster' child—a human anomaly in a world of strange creatures—is accompanied by a suggestion that she is somehow more real ('twice as natural') than the other characters, literally true but also suggestive of excessive vitality.

makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed' (*Pan* 46). Moreau laments his inability to influence the Beast People's 'strange hidden reservoir [that may] burst suddenly and inundate the whole being of the creatures with anger, hate, or fear' (122). Similarly, Hyde is the long-caged 'devil' who 'came out roaring', while Jekyll's body can barely withstand 'the raging energies of life' (Stevenson 64, 68). Throughout the Gothic, then, monstrous life resists containment and breaks out of its confining borders. The boundaries of human shape and material reality are threatened by an eruption of vigorous, monstrous, and potentially chaotic and indiscriminate energy.

Animal Fire

In *Essays and Observations*, John Hunter described 'Life as a Fire, or something similar, which might for distinction's sake be called Animal Fire' (113). Ayesha gains her long life from 'the Fire... which is Nature's blood and life' (Haggard *She* 273). In *Dracula*, not only has the vampire great strength and the ability to change shape, but the corrupt, often sexualised, vitality of both Dracula and Lucy is emphasised as a sort of visible flame. She is 'voluptuous' and 'her eyes blazed with unholy light', while his eyes have a lurid red light 'as if the flames of hell-fire blazed behind them', and later 'flamed red with a devilish passion' (Stoker *Dracula* 253, 52, 336). Animal Fire encapsulates the excess of monstrous life, generated by hellish impulses. Botting, however, presents a reading of *Dracula* that interprets the vampire's existence as an organic, spontaneous act of natural life:

To explain the vampire phenomenon, Van Helsing speculates that the resting-place of the undead is connected to certain geological and chemical anomalies, arguing that 'there is something magnetic or electric in some of these combinations of occult forces which work for physical life in strange way'. With this kind of science to invoke, it is a short step to see Dracula as

an anomaly of nature rather than an unnatural phantasm, a monstrosity antipathetic to 'human nature' perhaps, but resolutely of nature none the less. ('The Gothic Production of the Unconscious' 15)

In this interpretation, Dracula's undead life is explained by anomalous conditions that have chanced to work in favour of physical life. Monstrosity is generated not only by hell, but by nature, and in these terms Dracula is a borderline monster of ambiguous origins like the hellish Thing of Hodgson's 'Out of the Storm'.

In Hodgson's 'The Derelict', the doctor ruminates on the 'Life-Force', recounting a tale of an old ship which comes to life and attempts to consume the sailors who board it. He argues life is possible in any sort of matter:

So potent is the share of the *Material* in the production of that thing which we name Life, and so eager the Life-force to express itself, that I am convinced it would, given the right conditions, make itself manifest even through so hopeless-seeming a medium as a simple block of sawn wood; for I tell you, gentlemen, the Life-Force is both as fiercely urgent and as indiscriminate as Fire—the Destructor; yet which some are now growing to consider the very essence of Life rampant. (33)

The doctor's language suggests both Hunter's Animal Fire and the same brimming, vigorous 'energies of life' that characterise Hyde's desire for existence; life exceeds all limits and knows no boundaries. The doctor wishes to know what the ship's original cargo was, speculating that its content 'plus the heat and time she had endured, plus one or two other only guessable quantities' was the right combination, like the conditions sustaining Dracula, for 'the chemistry of the Life-Force' ('Derelict' 54).

The signs of life accumulate gradually as the sailors approach and board the derelict. Up close, the vessel's side is covered in thick, spongy mould with 'a reg'lar skin to it' (40), suggesting the surface of a living form. The excess of living principle in the ship is suggested by the unusually large sea-lice—'a foot long, if it's a hinch!'—implying not only firstly that the ship is alive, like the 'live cod' usually hosting the parasites, and secondly that it is particularly, excessively, nutritious or fertile (42). A hole made by the captain's foot gives a blood-like 'gush of a purplish fluid' (43). Finally, the ship needs to feed. The mould is soon 'in active movement', and before the sailors can escape to the boat, one man is consumed:

His feet had sunk out of sight. The stuff appeared to be *lapping* at his legs; and abruptly his bare flesh showed. The hideous stuff had rent his trouser-legs away, as if they were paper. He gave out a simply sickening scream, and, with a vast effort, wrenched one leg free. It was partly destroyed. The next instant he pitched face downward, and the stuff heaped itself upon him, as if it were actually alive, with a dreadful savage life. (46)

Meanwhile they hear a 'Thud! Thud! Thud!' like a giant heartbeat from within the ship, and the hull develops as 'ugly purple veinings ... like you will see the veins stand out on the body of a powerful full-blooded horse' (48). Finally the captain yells out the explanation that the doctor 'both repelled and reached towards': '*She's alive!*' (51).

Abjection is signalled by the doctor's simultaneous rejection and desire for the only possible, horrifying explanation. It is also signalled by the ship's 'peculiar smell' that is 'vaguely familiar', which the doctor eventually identifies as a 'vague animal smell' (38). The doctor is reluctant to identify with the ship as another living creature, but he

cannot resist the sense of familiarity.⁵⁵ The abomination of the derelict is contained in the transgression of the life given to what should be inanimate matter. It is not only Animalia that humans should fear, but the potential for spontaneous life contained in the entire material world as the divisions between the animate and inanimate dissolve.

‘The Derelict’ forms ‘an attempt to fully realise the horrific potentialities of an utterly material universe, to theorize such concepts as life, volition, consciousness in materialist terms’ (Hurley *Gothic Body* 37). The young narrator cannot accept that life is a force like electricity or fire, arguing that ‘Life’s a kind of spiritual mystery’ (‘Derelict’ 34). For the doctor, life is simply a natural force, no more or less, not endowed by any higher being, just a product of conditions and material. He allows that there is a third ‘something’, required to produce life, but not ‘a spiritual mystery’. He laughs at this suggestion: ‘Easy, my boy! ... or I may be asking you to demonstrate the spiritual mystery of life of the limpet, or the crab’ (34). The premise of the story thus takes the blindness of nature and evolution to one of its logical extremes; the story asks why mammals or even invertebrates should have a monopoly on life, and why any material should not have life. Evolution challenged the notion that humans have a special spirit or soul; the narrator embodies a persisting sense that, even when evolution is accepted, life is something divine.

However, if humanity’s animal heritage is valid, then a ‘spiritual mystery’ cannot be true for us but not be true for limpets. Either all life has meaning, or none of it does.

‘The Derelict’ destabilises the boundaries of living and dead matter, and in *The Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’* the boundaries of different living kingdoms are challenged. In the opening chapters, the sailors are drawn in amongst the vegetation on the banks of the creek in search of fresh water. They see something on a tree that looks like a bird; ‘an excrescence upon the trunk’. Winterstraw naïvely dismisses the ‘excrescence’ as ‘a

⁵⁵ ‘Familiarity’ is used here in the sense of knowing or recognising rather than in the Freudian sense of uncanny or *heimlich*.

freak of nature', as if he has gone without noticing that everything for the past seventeen pages has been a 'freak of nature'. Nor does it seem to occur to him that this does not mean harmless, or powerless, or subordinate to the human; a freak of nature, after all, is a monster. Instead, he has 'a sudden thought that it would make me a curio' (18); his assumption of human invulnerability and ownership of nature is almost an imperial arrogance, failing to observe that the creature he faces is as alive as he is.

The bo'sun and Winterstraw suddenly realise that they are facing the day-time form of the cloth-monster when 'the tree wailed at us' (18). Winterstraw sees a 'brown, human face peering at us from between the wrapped branches...it was of a part with the trunk of the tree; for I could not tell where it ended and the tree began' (19). The border between the face and the trunk is blurred; the boundary between human and other is horrifyingly absent. In Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams* (1907), Lucian has a similar encounter with some 'ugly misshapen trees' in an ancient fort, bearing 'forms that imitated the human shape, and faces and twining limbs that amazed him... a twisted root swelled into a limb; in the hollows of the rotten bark he saw the masks of men' (20). In both cases, the monstrous trees mimic human forms, but it seems that Hodgson's tree-monsters have also absorbed them. The boundaries between plant and animal, the inanimate and the living, are eradicated. The bo'sun attacks the tree, which 'did bleed like any live creature' and tries to capture the apprentice: 'one of the great cabbage-like things pursued him upon its stem, even as an evil serpent' (*Boats* 19).

The fundamental function of the living principle is to distinguish living matter from dead matter. It does not matter whether this matter is animal, vegetable, or something else. In *Essays and Observations* Hunter provides a definition of what constitutes an animal and what a vegetable because, he says, general opinion is 'not determined on where the animal ends and where the vegetable begins' (16). In *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, the living principle combined with evolution allows his monsters to flout the

boundaries not only of form but of kingdom. The human is literally blended with the vegetable, and this medley is further compared to a reptile.

The texture of these blended monsters is also important. When the narrator touches the tree-monster, 'its trunk was as soft as pulp under my fingers, much after the fashion of a mushroom'. The fungal analogy indicates the morphic potentiality of the 'tree' as well as positioning it as an organism neither animal nor plant.⁵⁶ The presence of the human face, the 'cabbage-like' appendage, and the fungal texture suggest this monster straddles the boundaries of Plantae, Animalia, and Protista. Similarly, in 'The Derelict' the ship is surrounded by a 'curious scum' and with 'great clumpings of strange-looking sea-fungi under the bows', and the deck has 'a spongy, puddingy feel', suggestive of a fungus-like texture (39-40).

Fungus is a particularly useful material out of which to create a monster because it is so plastic—it can easily look like a human, or a plant, or a ship. In 'The Voice in the Night', the human castaway and his fiancée gradually turn into fungus, a substance that is neither plant nor animal, and he becomes a 'thing' that is both human-and-boat. Squishiness is characteristic of most of Hodgson's Sargasso monsters, emphasising their repulsive plasticity and their resistance of classification. Soft, malleable substances occupy a gap somewhere between one or more kingdoms of the natural world. This borderland is where the weirdest forms of Hodgsonian life flourish. The derelict also has a 'skin', an outline; the mould-like substance of the derelict is not only matter that has lost its form, but that has reconstituted a new one—a new form of life.

Fungi also carry connotations of necrophagy, feeding off dead matter and darkness rather than sunlight. They are thus able, perhaps more than plants, to transform dead matter into new living shapes: the spongy mould covering the ship of 'The Derelict'

⁵⁶ The divisions of living organisms had always been subject to speculation: in 1866 Haeckel added Protista to the Animalia and Plantae kingdoms proposed by Linnaeus in the eighteenth century, and Hodgson's monsters blur all three (Margulis *Diversity of Life* 10).

may form the link sought by the doctor in the transformation of the ship's dead wood and its cargo into a living organism. Fungus suggests a changeable, borderland form of life. In *The War of the Worlds*, the narrator notes 'something fungoid in the oily brown skin' of the Martians emerging from the cylinder (28). This may in one way reflect the Martians' vampiric feeding habits: haemophagy and necrophagy are both suggestive Undead behaviours. It also suggests a blending of biological kingdoms within the monstrous body, and in Hodgson's novels even entire landscapes can become hungry and alive.

Living landscapes

In Hodgson's stories, any form of matter can come to life, including the Gothic landscape. The Land of Lonesomeness episode of *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* suggests that the sailors have sailed into a land that is weirdly alive. To Winterstraw the Land of Lonesomeness seems 'desolate' and 'a slimy wilderness'; he views the 'surrounding wastes' with distaste (*Boats* 5). In Hodgson's Sargasso Sea stories, the characters similarly view the Sargasso's expanse of weed as a 'waste' ('From the Tideless Sea' 65). Winterstraw, however, soon qualifies his assessment of lifelessness: 'the vegetation, where it grew, did flourish most luxuriantly; so I am scarce correct when I speak of life as being extinct in that land' (*Boats* 7). The word 'luxuriant', however, implies an almost obscene fecundity. The vegetation clearly does not owe its existence to 'honest earth': 'For, indeed, now that I think of it, I can remember that the very mud from which it sprang seemed veritably to have a fat, sluggish life of its own, so rich and viscid was it' (7). The mud's 'fat richness' makes it look 'fit to crawl', suggesting gluttony or a superfluity of ingestion (16). Far from being barren, the Land of Lonesomeness is more actively and excessively alive than normal land. It has a terrible greediness; the mud is vital, almost personified, and the vegetation is correspondingly lush.

In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin includes an upbeat reflection on the struggle for existence: 'we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply' (66). However, in the Gothic environment, the opposite is the case. The monstrous and the distorted survive and multiply, products of an abominable evolutionary process and appropriately spawned from abominably rich and fertile mud, while the 'healthy', represented by the human presence, is consumed, corrupted, or repelled. The sailors are anxious not to touch the mud; a ladder is laid over 'several hatch covers' and they are thus able to ascend the bank 'without contact with the mud' (16). The mud threatens abominable contamination, or being consumed, as the voracious mouldy ship in 'The Derelict' consumes the unfortunate sailor. Human identity is threatened by the entire organic, material world, here represented by living earth. The natural world wants to absorb the human: mother nature becomes the 'devouring mother' of Kristeva's maternal abject (*Powers of Horror* 54).

In *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, the discovery of the anthropophagous tree-monsters finally connects the various horrors: the 'fatness' of the mud, the hungry growling, the terror and melancholy of the wailing. Together they make up a living, voracious, deadly habitat; a landscape with a life of its own. In the last few paragraphs of this episode, the land grows increasingly alive, until Winterstraw and his companions are forced to flee a swarming profusion of tree-monsters while the bestial landscape roars around them. All around 'bellowed that vast growling, being more fearsome than ever I had heard it, until it seemed to me that we had waked all that land of terror to a knowledge of our presence' (19–20). The whole land is inscribed with a consciousness, so that the first episode of the novel culminates in an eruption of living horror, monstrous and overwhelming.

The landscape of *The Night Land* also has a sort of collective consciousness: it frequently seems 'waked, and unquiet' and there are occasionally 'low roars that went

across the Land' (363). After the Great Redoubt makes contact with the Lesser Redoubt, 'all through the Night Land there was an extraordinary awakening among the Monsters and Forces', which use various tactics to trick the humans into leaving their pyramid. The conscious land is particularly characterised as hungry. From the Mountain of the Voice comes a call 'as though a giant woman, hungering strangely, shouted unknown words across the night'; the Night Land is eager and voracious. In *The Boats of the Glen Carrig* the 'doleful wailing' of the Land of Lonesomeness is accompanied by 'an insistent, hungry snarl'. For Winterstraw this 'note of hunger ... more than all the rest of those incredible voicings, brought terror into my heart' (*Boats* 6). The fear of being eaten is the worst fear of all, of complete assimilation into and by the 'gothicized subject'.

Furthermore, the process of being eaten is also one of feeding: contributing to the success of the other as an organism. Wells's Martians, for example, feed not only on the blood of captured humans, but also on that of human-shaped creatures brought as food for their journey: 'bipeds with flimsy, silicious skeletons ... standing about six feet high and having round, erect heads' (*War of the Worlds* 208). Whether or not the Martians have evolved, as the narrator believes, from human-like creatures, at this time on Mars their vampiric species is dominant and the human-shaped species is subjugated as food. The law of nature is kill or be killed, eat or be eaten. Dr. Moreau, for example, fails to alter natural law in his creations as easily as he alters their shapes. He creates new rules for his Beast People in an attempt to define them as human: 'Not to eat Flesh or Fish; *that* is the law. Are we not Men?' (*Moreau* 89). However, the Beast People inevitably break these laws and ultimately revert to their animal origin. To be a human in this context means to be set apart from the laws of nature, but these laws govern natural selection, and humans are not exempt. The successful organism eats the unsuccessful and therefore lives to contribute to the continuation of its species.

In both the Night Land and the Land of Lonesomeness, the noises of hunger are made by the various resident monsters, but the text is either not at any great pains to distinguish monster from landscape, or else deliberately conflates them. The series of colossal, indescribable creatures keeping a watch on the pyramid are a living part of the landscape. The 'Thing in the South' is 'a living hill of watchfulness ... It brooded there, squat and tremendous' (*Night Land* 42). Later in the story, a black 'Humped thing' climbs out of the Vale of Red Fire and approaches 'like a Hill of Blackness in the Land' while the Watcher of the North-West rises 'up into the Night, like a hill' (98, 154). It resembles 'a thing of Rock, all scored and beweathered ... and might have root within the earth' (154). The land itself comes alive, threateningly vital, and as far as the threat to the human goes, there is no distinction: landscape and denizen are both monstrous, both other.

The five hundred youths who leave the Great Redoubt in an attempt to reach the Lesser Redoubt repel an attack by some 'awesome Brutes... their size and brutishness was like to that of odd and monstrous animals of the olden world; yet part human' (90). Curiously, once these monsters are dead they seem to become part of the land again: 'of those seven and twenty Giant Brutes there remained none; only that there cumbered the ground seven and twenty lumbering hillocks, dreadful and grim' (90). X, similarly, is attacked by a multi-limbed Yellow Thing, which 'did hump upward from out of the sand, as it had been a low hillock that did live' (175). The Night Land seems to respond to human incursions as a body might respond to an infection, generating a selection of horrors that attempt to destroy the invaders, before being reabsorbed by the landscape.

The monster and the monstrous landscape share an excess of the living principle that dwarfs the strength of humans. In these environments, the presence of humans arouses the monstrous in their surroundings. Hodgson's land- and seascapes offer little in the way of safe havens, and the protection of hulls and pyramid is constantly under attack as monstrous life in all its forms attempts to overwhelm human life. In Hodgson's novels

and stories, the power of monstrosity is so strong that humans themselves become marginalised, pushed to the borders of the natural world, struggling to maintain a construction of normality assailed on all sides by evolutionary pressures.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a range of ways in which the monstrous manifests corporeally in Hodgson's narratives and in other *fin-de-siècle* Gothic texts. Monstrosity is often constructed as abnormality; for *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, abnormality is contained in difference of shape and behaviour, whose regularity is defined by the norms of late Victorian culture. Monsters are presented as the negative of humans, as evolutionary and flexible, as constructed and liminal, as ugly and repulsive, blending monstrous characteristics into borderland forms. Hodgson's texts ascribe revulsion, and thereby monstrosity, to threatening corporeal shapes, which are always bestial or hybrid unlike the human-seeming monsters of most other *fin-de-siècle* Gothic. Only Wells focuses so exclusively on the possibilities offered by evolution, progressive and degenerative, for shape. The evil inner nature of Hodgson's monsters is displayed through physiognomic registers, but the texts also problematise these registers by manifesting some monstrosity as abominable and some as non-abominable. Hodgson attempts to inscribe his monsters with a spiritual or moral meaning of naturalness or abominableness that Wells, an evolutionary purist, deliberately elides.

Hodgson uses his monsters to interrogate borderlands not only of physical shape but also of living principles, investigating the roles of materiality and spirituality in the creation of life from any form of matter. The vitality of monstrosity bursts the boundaries of any limits or systems humans attempt to impose on corporeal life, such as adherence to the three kingdoms or to known systems of form. Monstrosity also violates the limits of the individual body, breaking through its own boundaries with abject secretions such as slime, rendering itself indeterminate and undifferentiated.

Hodgson's most frightening monsters are unspeakable and unclassifiable in their appearance, evil in their natures, and subject to multiple interpretations. The ambivalent qualities of Hodgson's monsters indicate them as borderline: they are able to exist on many levels, continually blurring the boundaries between. This ambiguous existence generates fear and uncertainty; monstrosity erupts in so many places in Hodgson's texts that it threatens to overwhelm human existence. Locations like the Sargasso Sea form a borderland in which the struggle for existence between humanity and monstrosity can be enacted. Monstrosity, for Hodgson, exhibits itself as animalian, endowed with physical strength but mental simplicity, while humans have a spiritual strength but are physically and evolutionary less fit. The question over who can lay claim to future existence is continually played out through liminal, borderland landscapes and bodies.

Chapter Six

Living beyond the end: entropy, evolution, and the death of the sun in *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land*

The object of this chapter is to put *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland* in the context of some of the eschatological anxieties of the *fin de siècle* around the death of the sun and the end of life on earth. Hodgson's novels form part of early science fiction's imaginative responses to the perceived implications of the laws of thermodynamics, promulgated by William Thomson and others in the second half of the nineteenth century. Along with evolutionary theory, thermodynamics, especially the law of entropy, provided a backdrop on which myths of humanity's long-term future could be plotted. In his two eschatological novels, Hodgson plays out his own versions of these myths in the borderlands of the planet's future.

The laws of thermodynamics stated that while energy was not lost from a closed system (such as the universe) its transformations tended towards disorder or uselessness. This was termed 'entropy' by Rudolf Clausius in 1867, derived from the Greek word for transformation (Clausius 357). Applied to solar physics, the sun as a source of light and heat became understood as finite, like a furnace consuming fuel: in time, luminary and planets would age and cool, leading, it was imagined, to the extinction of humanity on a dark and frozen earth. While imaginative responses to these concepts emerged in many literary forms and genres—Swinburne's poem 'The Garden of Proserpine' (1866), Hardy's novel *Two on a Tower* (1882), for example—science fiction was able to take readers into detailed speculative futures.

Hodgson's predecessors in the dying earth tradition included Camille Flammarion, whose *Fin du Monde* (1893) was translated into English in 1894 as *Omega: the last days of the world*. Despite escaping destruction by a giant comet, the aging earth's loss of its water causes atmospheric cooling and surface freezing, so that humanity's extinction results from a combination of cold and drought long before the sun's fuel expires. The earth 'lost the conditions for life more rapidly than the central luminary lost its heat and its light ... vapour of water in the atmosphere had made warmth and life possible; with its disappearance came cold and death' (*Omega* 225, 277). Flammarion also published a short story called 'The Last Days of the Earth' in the *Contemporary Review* in 1891, in which ice age is caused by a cooling sun: some of the material from this, specifically the characters and fate of the last two humans, Omegar and Eva, finds its way into *Omega*. However, Flammarion's story should not be confused with the novel, nor with a similarly-titled story by George C. Wallis from 1901 in the *Harmsworth Magazine*, 'The Last Days of Earth'. All three of these texts imagine the end of the world by freezing.

Wells's awareness of the aging solar system appears in several texts including 'The Man of the Year Million' and *The Time Machine*, in both of which the cooling sun darkens and freezes the earth, and *The War of the Worlds*, in which the aging Mars is presented as a possible future for the earth. In 1910, J.-H. Rosny aîné's *The Death of the Earth*, in which humans die out due to lack of water in a warming desert world and are replaced by an iron-based species, was published in France (as *La Mort de la Terre*). Rosny's novel, however, was not translated into English until 1978, although since Hodgson lived in France before the First World War it is possible he may have read it. *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland* share affinities with these texts in their mutual concern with the fate of humanity on the margins of survival in the evolutionary future of the earth: the planet ages, the environment changes, the sun dies.

The concepts of entropy and the heat-death of the sun filtered into late Victorian thought around the same time as the implications of evolutionary theory. Entropy and evolution were both parts of what Huxley concisely termed the ‘cosmic process’: the relentless pressures of the universe that continually shape its forms. Pamela Gossin identifies geology and astronomy as the two Tennysonian ‘terrible muses’ inspiring nineteenth-century literature, and notes that

biological evolution on earth was considered by at least some Victorian thinkers to be a continuation of cosmic evolution in the universe. The inorganic development of the galaxies, stars, and planetary systems gave birth to organic development, so astronomy and Darwinism were naturally linked in the scientific story of the cosmos. (Gossin 55)

The perceived link between cosmic and biological evolution means that texts like *The Time Machine*, *Omega*, and *The Night Land* interweave both themes through the same narrative. The evolution of humanity is seen to take place in a finite universe: an apogee of physical perfection and civilised society may be reached, but will also be subject to inexorable cosmic processes that will eventually lead to decline and extinction. ‘If, for millions of years, our globe has taken the upward route,’ wrote Huxley in 1893, ‘yet, some time, the summit will be reached and the downward route will be commenced’ (‘Evolution and Ethics’ 85).

Eschatological narratives played out the mortality of the human race alongside the mortality of the solar system. This is, in part, possible because of a fundamental discrepancy between the length of the past and future life of the earth as argued by Charles Lyell in *Principles of Geology* (1837) and Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species*, and that proposed by William Thomson in the 1880s. The gradual process of evolution required hundreds of millions years in both past and future for the changes

observed in species and rocks to take place. Thomson, however, ‘used the new science of energy to show just how wrong those theories were’ (Bowler and Morus 93). In 1887 he claimed it was ‘exceedingly rash to assume as probable anything more than twenty million years of the sun’s light in the past history of the earth, or to reckon on any more than five or six million years of sunlight for time to come’ (‘On the Sun’s Heat’ 397). Thomsonian physics meant that the death of the sun ‘was rendered historically foreseeable’ (G. Beer ‘Death of the Sun’ 168). Consequently, so was human extinction, and therefore human and geological evolution had to take place within Thomson’s timescale.

Fiona Stafford remarks that even ‘if Darwin and Thomson regarded their theories as mutually incompatible, imaginative writers were able to draw on both in the creation of nightmarish visions of the future’ (305). By an imaginative trick of fitting Darwinian evolution more or less into Thomson’s time frame, and by describing the passage of that time in images drawing attention to its length and distance (the dying sun winding down, the gradual freezing of the world), the futures described by Wells, Flammarion, and Hodgson *seem* longer than they actually are. In *The Night Land*, for example, the memory of the sun has passed so far beyond remembrance that its very existence is doubted; it is a myth ‘believed not by men of sanity’ and reduced to ‘impossible lullabies’ (39). History appears longer because time passes more quickly in human records and memories than it does in geology. In *Omega*, the sea rises and the mountains are flattened in a mere nine million years, by which time, in an explicit echo of Huxley ‘the conditions of terrestrial life began to fail; [and] humanity, instead of advancing, was itself to enter upon its downward path’ (*Omega* 222).

These texts appear to speak of unimaginable lengths of time, accounting for drastic evolutionary changes, but in fact the narratives do not exceed Thomson’s estimate by much. In *Omega*, Flammarion gives ‘a future for the sun of at least twenty million years’ (276), although time and the universe are infinite. In *The Time Machine*, Wells

stretches Thomsonian time (or compresses the cosmic process) to enable Darwinian evolution to take place, and in doing so ‘renders a thirty million-year future thinkable’ (Parrinder 40). In this way fiction can resolve the clash between the two theories and at the same time compound the dual anxieties they generated into a single myth. These texts form a borderland in which conflicting theories can imaginatively coexist.

In the late nineteenth century, social Darwinism and degeneration theory compounded this merged perspective on the future. The degenerative adaptation of the human form went hand-in-hand with the collapse of civilisation, amidst an increasingly hostile global environment caused by the entropy of the solar system. Nordau’s *Degeneration* illustrates how these anxieties form a composite image of entropy and degeneration:

In our days there have arisen in more highly-developed minds vague qualms of a Dusk of the Nations, in which all suns and all stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is perishing in the midst of a dying world. (2)

Nordau uses the image of the waning sun to indicate his pessimistic uncertainty about the future (for which he goes on to blame decadent art); the inevitable death of the sun seemed a fitting symbol for the inevitable degeneration of civilisation into decadent entropy and the decline of imperial power.⁵⁷

The cooling of the sun and the consequent freezing of the earth meant that human evolution ultimately appears as a choice between extinction and retrogressive metamorphosis to fit an increasingly hostile environment. Since ‘what is “fittest”

⁵⁷ Concerns over imperial decline also contributed to this characteristic malaise, echoed, as Brantlinger argues, in *fin-de-siècle* imperial Gothic narratives which ‘express the narrowing vistas of the British Empire at the time of its greatest extent, in the moment before its fall’ (*Rule of Darkness* 253).

depends on the conditions' these inevitable changes in our planet's environment will not naturally favour humans in their present form (Huxley 'Evolution and Ethics' 80). Huxley argued that 'If... [our globe] is gradually cooling down... the time must come when evolution will mean adaptation to an universal winter, and all forms of life will die out, except such low and simple organisms as the Diatom of the arctic and antarctic ice and the Protococcus of the red snow' ('Struggle for Existence' 199). Thus in *The Time Machine* animal life becomes simpler and simpler until a 'round thing' hopping on the darkening seashore is all that is left. Extinction, here, is the retrogression of human and animal life beyond recognition to undifferentiated 'things'.

In other texts, the evolutionary path to human extinction takes a different route. Flammarion's *Omega* and Rosny's *The Death of the Earth* both depict human extinction due to the loss of the planet's water while the sun is still vital. In *Omega*, despite technological and social progress and a certain amount of adaptation—'a new system of alimentation' and 'psychic faculties in perpetual play' for communication (231-2)—humans finally die out with all other life in the cold desert of the aging earth. In *The Death of the Earth*, the humans are usurped by the 'ferromagnetics', an iron-based species of organism better fitted to a waterless, and this time hot, future world. Rosny and Flammarion present future borderlands of extinction in which species compete for survival in the new environment as Hodgson's humans and monsters do in the Sargasso Sea, with humans once more on the losing side.

In *The Death of the Earth*, despite a shrunken digestive system and enlarged chests to suit their frugal existence and the thin desert air, humans fail to adapt sufficiently to the changing environment: 'It was not man's mind that was limited, it was the structure of his being itself: born of water, he must perish with it' (Rosny 159). In both novels civilisation has collapsed and humanity has degenerated socially and morally from its earlier utopian peak. However, the consequence of hostile environmental conditions is extinction rather than retrogressive metamorphosis. Wells, perhaps, was unusual in

being able to imagine so relentlessly such drastic physical retrogression; Rosny, Flammarion, and Hodgson prefer to keep the race recognisably intact until the end.

This is more than just evolutionary squeamishness: the continuation of humans in form and mind is important to these writers' themes, especially Hodgson's and Flammarion's. Hodgson and Flammarion include psychic evolution in their humans' development and hint at the eternal survival of immortal souls. All three suggest that life and evolution are cyclic: the usurping ferromagnetics of *The Death of the Earth* form a 'New Order of Things'; in *Omega*, from the condensing and rekindling of the dead matter, 'new worlds' are born of 'primordial star-mist' and thus 'another universe began' (286); *The Night Land* produces a 'primal world' which is part of a historical pattern of regeneration: 'out of the End came the Beginning, and Life out of Death, and Good out of that which did seem a dire matter... And so it is always' (423). As well as the entropic tendencies set out by the second law of thermodynamics, these texts also remember the first law: that energy in a closed system is conserved, not lost.

Moreover, by the 1900s, the research of Ernest Rutherford and Frederick Soddy into radioactivity would overturn the assumption that this conserved energy could never be turned to any use. Patrick Parrinder notes that by 1908, 'the calculations of planetary cooling reflected in both *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* lose their sway over contemporary scientific opinion' and that later Wells's outlook moved from 'entropic pessimism to a position much closer to Soddy's thermonuclear optimism' (Parrinder 46-7). Soddy, lecturing in 1908, explained that 'Radium has taught us that there is no limit to the amount of energy in the world available to support life, save only the limit imposed by the boundaries of knowledge' (*Interpretation of Radium* 252). For Soddy, nature was full of untapped sources of energy. The Earth-Current of *The Night Land* may be seen as the tapping of a new form of electromagnetic energy, made available by the broadening of scientific knowledge of access and control, and 'from which all had life and light and safety' (*Night Land* 101). Conversely, however, the

meddling of science has also opened up the world to the evil forces that now threaten the human race with spiritual destruction across the breached Barrier of Life.

All these texts portray visions of the extinction of humankind due to a combination of the forces of evolution and thermodynamics. Hodgson's *The Night Land*, however, is more complex than any of the others (excepting *The Time Machine*) because it focuses less on humanity's actual extinction than on its ability to survive in the meantime. The final climax of Rosny's and Flammarion's stories is the death of the last man, while in *The Night Land* the extinction of humans is still a long way off, perhaps millions of years after the time of the story.⁵⁸ Hodgson's focus is on the experience of his narrator in the sunless world and on what human survival in this world might be like. By having the human race surviving inside an arcology barricaded off from the rest of the world, he is able to juxtapose humanity's continual survival against the consequences of ceasing to struggle. These results are demonstrated by the monstrous descendants of those humans who were too degenerate to join the sound millions in the pyramid, and in the dreadful forces capable of destroying the eternal spirit. In this way Hodgson is able to explore both possible sides of humanity's borderline future: the strategy of resistance of the cosmic process due to social order, technological prowess, and moral strength; and the destruction and degeneration that would result from attempting to adapt to or live in the Night Land without the protection of 'that Great Pyramid of grey metal which held the last millions of this world from the Power of the Slayers' (34).

Hodgson's humans have consciously refused to adapt through physical metamorphosis, and have avoided extinction by dominating natural processes and becoming spiritually and psychically advanced. The result, however, is that they are no longer a natural part of their environment, but have become interlopers living isolated in an unfamiliar world, a borderland between their former natural habitat and ultimate,

⁵⁸ These texts belong to a tradition of 'Last Man' fiction which also includes Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901).
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overdue extinction. For the humans, the uncanniness and darkness of the entropic landscape produce what Martin Heidegger calls ‘the existential “mode” of the “*not-at-home*”’: the fear of being lost or disorientated in an unfamiliar place generates anxiety about not belonging to the world (233, H. 189). Humanity attempts to resolve this by orientation: mapping the strange features of the land; and by recreating an artificially-lit civilisation of cities and countryside within the Great Redoubt. At the same time, they must resist the more tangible threats of physical and spiritual destruction that are constantly present all around them. The Great Redoubt’s strategies of resisting the cosmic process will be discussed fully in Chapter Seven.

This chapter will begin by looking at *fin-de-siècle* imaginative responses to the implications of the second law of thermodynamics. *The Time Machine*, *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land* both adopt some of the classic images of solar and planetary entropy in their depictions of the aging solar system. All three novels explore the possibilities for human evolution within this framework as well as the fears generated by the perception of human insignificance at the edges of a vast and indifferent universe. However, into this existentially pessimistic background, Hodgson’s novels introduce a spiritual transcendence through the existence of eternal souls, exploring the philosophical borderlands of an afterlife rationalised by nineteenth-century spiritualism and psychical research. Furthermore, *The Night Land* also combines the Victorian scientific outlook on the age of the earth and sun with the implications of Edwardian discoveries in radioactivity about the nature of transformations of energy. These novels, presenting powerful visions of universal heat-death, nevertheless also establish the possibility for rejuvenation inherent in the cosmos as well as in the eternity of the human soul.

'The twilight of the world': mythologizing the death of the sun

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
...
The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,
The moon their mistress had expir'd before;
The winds were withered in the stagnant air,
And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need
Of aid from them—She was the Universe.
Byron, 'Darkness' (1816)

Inspired in part by the chill and gloom of the 'year without a summer' in 1816, caused by the meteorological effects of the eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora the year before, Byron's poem captures a vision of entropy. Although written long before Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, or William Thomson's 'On the Age of the Sun's Heat', 'Darkness' reflects contemporary thinking about geological time and the life of the earth that was already filtering into nineteenth-century perceptions. These ideas inspired an eschatological mythology, one which developments in the physical sciences would help to crystallise into the themes of dying earth fiction, played out in the borderlands of planetary and human existence.

Thomson predicted in 1862 that 'inhabitants of the earth cannot continue to enjoy the light and heat essential to their life, for many million years longer, unless sources now unknown to us are prepared in the great storehouse of creation' ('On the Age of the

Sun's Heat' 393). Later, through radioactivity, Rutherford and Soddy would envision the possibility of unlimited transformations of energy, foreshadowed by Thomson's allusion to 'sources now unknown' (G. Beer 'Death of the Sun' 175). At the time, Thomson's announcement 'triggered a widespread cultural anxiety that encompassed no less than the cooling of the world and the death of all things as the sun burned itself out' (Gold 452). However, how far a 'widespread cultural anxiety' can be 'triggered' in this way is hard to tell; 'Darkness' suggests that (like evolutionary theory) such concerns were already in circulation before the Victorian period.

The cooling sun, it was thought, would lead to a frozen earth. Again, Thomson's predictions gave new expression to an awareness that already existed, this time about the return of ice age. In the Alps the imaginations of Byron and Shelley, according to Robert Macfarlane, 'saw in the glaciers the agents of the world's end... the globe desolated by ice, and home to no man' (*Mountains of the Mind* 123). The world had once been covered in ice, and one day would be again. This perception is brought to chilly life in the dying earth stories of the *fin de siècle*.⁵⁹ Wallis's 'The Last Days of Earth' (1901) gives a particularly glacial picture. The two last humans chosen to survive on earth, Celia and Alwyn, survey a range of locations around the globe: 'In every daylight scene, the pale ghost of a dim, red sun hung in a clear sky' (Wallis 260). Each location is ice-covered: 'They looked upon a telegraphically-transmitted view of a place near which had once been Santiago, Chili [sic]. There were the ruins of an immense white city there now' and 'a cold sea moaned over an icy bar, and dashed in semi-frozen spray under the bluff of an over-hanging glacier's edge' (259).

⁵⁹ Another contemporary apocalyptic story, Frank Lillie Pollock's 'Finis' (1906) takes the other extreme. Its premise is that the mythical 'Central Sun' of the universe (like the one to which the Recluse travels in *The House on the Borderland*) exists 'so inconceivably remote that perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands of years would elapse before its light should burst upon the solar system' (245). When it does, life on earth is consumed by the immense heat: 'the new sun will always shine, and we could not endure it even another day. The wave of heat is passing around the world, and in a few hours the whole Earth will be a burnt-up ball' (253).

Gossin points out that the philosophical importance of earth's place and future in the universe is not unique to the Victorians: 'The themes of mutability and decay were ubiquitous in religious and creative literature throughout the Christian era and were well-integrated into daily meditations and contemplations of life on earth' (81). Thomson's essay, however, marks one of the most clearly identifiable points at which they were articulated in such a way as to be accessible to a wide range of people, through its publication in *Macmillan's Magazine*. As Greg Myers puts it, 'Prophets throughout the ages have predicted the end of the earth; Thomson gives a formula for its final temperature' (318). In *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land* Hodgson combines religious and philosophical visions of the world's end—the symbolic angels and Central Suns of *House*, for example—with late nineteenth-century entropic thinking shown in a world 'come to coldness and unfriendliness, by reason of the Sun's slow ceasing' (*Night Land* 129).

'With a reddish and barren light': the dying sun

The second law of thermodynamics exercised a grip over the Victorian imagination that expressed itself in vivid images of a dying sun, a frozen earth, and the extinguished stars which would ultimately comprise the universe. Gillian Beer suggests that 'conversation among articulate Victorians about solar physics and the prospects for life on earth in a cooling solar system worked, as half-formulated anxieties will, to generate much imaginative thought and production' and that the reception of scientific ideas by non-scientific Victorians meant that 'ideas of "force" and "energy", arguments concerning the age of the earth and the cooling of the sun, passed rapidly into an uncontrolled and mythologized form' ('Death of the Sun' 168, 164). Max Müller and astronomer Richard Proctor were among those promulgating such ideas, while writers like Hardy and Wells were among those bringing these images into their fiction: in *Two on a Tower*, Swithin envisions the dead planets as 'black invisible cinders' in 'a heaven of total darkness'

(Hardy 35), recalling the 'rayless stars' and the 'blind and blackening' earth of Byron's 'Darkness'.

By the last decades of the century, 'recognition set in that the running down of the universe was not a problem that science would one day solve, but rather a real, if disturbing, aspect of the physical universe' (DeWitt 484). The sun, as DeWitt points out, held a complex place in the Victorian imagination: 'it served as a source of and symbol for power, life, and creative energy, but writers and artists were also aware of its destructive potential and tended at times towards an elegiac mode centred on its withdrawal' (491). The image of the (typically red) dying sun passes into *fin-de-siècle* fiction; one passage of *The Night Land* dwells bleakly on the stilling sun that 'made a red gloom for a thousand miles', heralding 'the utter twilight of the world' (*Night Land* 130). The dying sun symbolises the temporal borderlands of human existence on earth: its slowing movements and fading light point forward to the darkness of the future and back to a reminder of the brighter past.

In Flammarion's 'The Last Days of the Earth', 'the sun continued to shine, but with a reddish and barren light' (569); in *Omega*, the sun 'will become a dark red ball, then a black one, and night will be perpetual' (109-10); in *The House on the Borderland* the sun is 'a tremendous globe of a glowing copper-bronze hue; in parts ringed with blood-red bands' (173); in *The Time Machine*, 'the sun, red and very large, halted motionless upon the horizon, a vast dome glowing with a dull heat' (81-2). In these images the sun is analogous to a cooling fire or coal, reflecting the opinion that it consisted of finite combustible material, and giving the impression of a gradual process of cooling. By speeding up time these descriptions reduce the sun to the humanly-visible process of a dying fire whose faint light no longer offers the promise of life. At the same time, the earth's rotation slows so that the sun appears to grow still. It is not only heat energy that is entropic, but also kinetic energy.

In 'On the Sun's Heat' (1887), Thomson compared the running of the solar system to that of a clock: 'there may in reality be nothing more of mystery and difficulty in the automatic process of the solar system... than there is in the winding up of a clock and letting it go till it stops' (422). Flammarion writes that 'the end came, and the hour sounded on the timepiece of destiny when the whole solar system was stricken from the book of life' (*Omega* 277). Flammarion's image picks up the concept of the universal clock, but it is not a clock which has run down, but one whose striking chimes define the lifetime of the stars, lifetimes which are barely a page within a much larger book.

The running clock, however, is a versatile metaphor for the life of the earth. In *The Time Machine*, the dials on the machine record time; 'the thousands [of days] hand was sweeping round as fast as the seconds hand of a watch' and 'the blinking succession of day and night, which was usually indicative of a slower pace, returned, and grew more and more marked' (*Time Machine* 81). The clock of the solar system winds down, until 'the sun had ceased to set—it simply rose and fell in the west' (81). In *The House on the Borderland*, a real clock is accelerated: 'The minute hand was moving round the dial, faster than an ordinary second hand. The hour-hand moved quickly from space to space' (*House* 163). Before long, the spinning hands have given way to days and nights as a measure of passing time: 'Faster and faster, spun the world. And now each day and night was completed within the space of a few seconds; and still the speed increased' (165). Later, the Recluse recalls that his first astral journey had impressed him with the idea of 'the Machine of a Universe allowed to run down an eternity, in a few moments or hours', explicitly aligning the entropic universe with Thomson's winding down clock (169).

The Recluse's journey closely parallels that of the Time Traveller, indicating both Wells's influence on Hodgson and the more general tendency of passing time to be imagined in terms of the solar movement that defines terrestrial days and nights. The Time Traveller sees 'the sun hopping swiftly across the sky, leaping it every minute,

and every minute marking a day' (*Time Machine* 19), and the Recluse describes a similar acceleration of time through the speeding up of the movement of the sun and moon through day and night. He watches the moon 'glide, with a strange swiftness, though the vast arc of blue; and ... the sun follows, springing out of the Eastern sky, as though in chase' (*House* 164). The sun 'began to assume the appearance of a vast, flaming comet, flaring across the sky' and as it accelerates 'the sun began to sway very slowly in the sky, from South to North, and then, slowly again, from North to South' (165). The Time Traveller describes how 'the jerking sun became a streak of fire, a brilliant arch' and 'the sun belt swayed up and down, from solstice to solstice' (*Time Machine* 19).

To the Time Traveller the 'whole surface of the earth seemed changed—melting and flowing under my eyes' and 'minute by minute the white snow flashed across the world, and vanished, and was followed by the bright, brief green of spring' (19, 20). For the Recluse, as time continues to accelerate, he notices 'a blurring sort of "flutter"' that he attributes to 'the incredibly rapid changes of the earth's surface', and that 'every few moments, so it seemed the snow would lie suddenly upon the world, and vanish as abruptly, as though an invisible giant "flitted" a white sheet on and off the earth' (*House* 167). The sensation of passing time evoked by these descriptions helps to account for the appearance, rather than the reality, of vast lengths of time generated by the narratives. Through these passages *The House on the Borderland* provides what *The Night Land* does not: a dynamic vision of the dying sun, a journey through the borderlands of time. *The House on the Borderland* fills the cosmological gap between the first chapter of *The Night Land* and the time of X's story, by which time the very existence of the sun is a doubtful matter for myth and fairytale and the surface of the earth described by the Recluse is given over to ice and snow.

Plot without man: surveying antiquity

Shortly before his death, Targ, the hero and last surviving human of Rosny's *The Death of the Earth*, gives us a brief survey of time which covers everything from the earliest point of evolution: 'For one last time his mind made the great voyage across the ages from the beginning of the earth' (180). He imagines 'the primitive sea, warm and swarming with life forms that had neither sense organs nor consciousness' and the gradual evolution of larger beings, 'bursting with energy, fertile without end' until mammals populate an earth that becomes dominated by ascending humanity (181). Surveying the end of his kind from his position as the last human, Targ blames humanity's 'mad conquest' of other life-forms for its ultimate death; he acknowledges that he is not witnessing 'the death of the earth' but 'rather the death of our reign on that earth' (182-3).

Evolutionary theory, Gillian Beer argues,

emphasises human unawareness of the past and obliges us to study a world from whose history we are largely absent. We must survey an antiquity in which we have no place. ... Lyell, and later Darwin, demonstrated in their major narratives of geological and natural history that it was possible to have plot without man—both plot previous to man and plot even now regardless of him. (*Darwin's Plots* 21)

Time travel and futuristic narratives provide a point at which to survey antiquity retrospectively. Targ looks up at the 'innumerable stars that had shone on a trillion men in the course of history; now there were only two eyes left to contemplate' them (Rosny 183). In the absence of human eyes, beyond the limits of humanity's survival as a species, history will continue infinitely, unknown and unobserved.

In *The House on the Borderland*, as the sun finally is reduced to ‘a vast, dead disk’ in the sky, ‘all the earth was silent. And there was a cold, such as no living man can ever have known’ (175). The Recluse, however, is in a position to ‘know’ it and even to report on it, although by now he is little more than a spirit (his body having crumbled to ‘grave-powder’ some millennia earlier) (170). The Recluse, like the Time Traveller and X, is in the unusual position of being able to observe and comment on our dying planet as it happens. Time travel and futuristic narratives are able to show the littleness and futility of the human condition, and the irrelevance of humans to the cosmic process. In *The Night Land*, through X, Hodgson tries to reinstate some purpose to futurity through the promise of the reincarnated spirit, as Chapter Seven will explore.

From his standpoint of countless millions of years in the future, X is the only person in the Great Redoubt who could tell the story of *The Night Land*, because he has the memories of his own era: ‘I stood and had suddenly the knowledge of a life already spent in that strange land, and deeper within me the misty knowings of this our present Age, and, maybe, also of some others’ (35). Although his perceptions of time and the present are tangled—‘I was less the man of years of *this* age, than the youth of *that*, with the natural knowledge of *that* life there; though, until that my first vision, I (of this Age) knew not of that other and Future Existence’—X has the benefit of the knowledge of his two lives, and the hints of other reincarnations in between (36). When he is joined by Naani, her memories of past lives assist the construction of the history of the earth: she recalls the era, for example, when ‘the Cities did move always unto the westward’ on ‘a great metal roadway, set in two lines that went forever unto the setting Sun’ and ‘behind them the Night did march forever’ (503). This offers a tantalising hint of the transitional epoch of the sun’s dying years, from a human perspective to complement the cosmological perspective of *The House on the Borderland*. In this way X surveys antiquity through the contrast of his own memories with the future world, through the

records humans have made of their own history, and through the memories that accompany his and Naani's eternal souls through their successive reincarnations.

Instead of the Recluse's dream-vision, the Time Traveller's journey, or *Omega's* omniscient narrator, *The Night Land* uses a different device to allow its protagonists to comment on the end of the world by heat-death, showing a simultaneity of dead and living worlds. In 'The Man of the Year Million', Wells's narrator speculates that the 'whole world will be snow-covered and piled with ice; all animals, all vegetation vanished, except this last branch of the tree of life. The last men have gone even deeper, following the diminishing heat of the planet' ('Man of the Year Million' 170-1). In *The Night Land*, this is indeed what has happened: life has survived by migrating into a chasm within the earth's crust. The region called the Night Land is about a hundred miles deep, in 'that mighty valley in which all life that was left of earth, did abide', below the frozen surface, near the warmth of the planet's core (248). The world above is dead and frozen while at the same time human and monstrous life continues near the core.

During his journey through the 'primal world' he has found, even deeper into the earth's crust than the Night Land, X is struck by the strangeness of lying 'warm and alive in a Country of red light and smoking seas' when

there was, in truth, afar above in the eternal and unknown night, the stupendous desolation of the dead world and the eternal snow and starless dark. And, as I do think, a cold so bitter that it held death to all living that should come anigh to it. (248)

The narrator's awed sense of 'stupendous desolation' accentuates the sense of humankind's irrelevance to the grand narrative of the world, or the universe.

In *The Time Machine*, the Time Traveller halts thirty million years into the future, when ‘the huge red-hot dome of the sun had come to obscure nearly a tenth part of the darkling heavens’ and he witnesses an eclipse of the sun. Frank McConnell calls Wells ‘the perfect lyricist of entropy... Not often in the history of the language has a vision of The End, a vision of the absolute conclusion of all things been so powerfully imagined’ (*Science Fiction of H. G. Wells* 86). The Time Traveller experiences the darkness and silence of the eclipse as if it were the solar system’s dying moment:

The darkness grew apace; a cold wind began to blow in freshening gusts from the east, and the showering white flakes in the air increased in number. From the edge of the sea came a ripple and whisper. Beyond these lifeless sounds the world was silent. Silent? It would be hard to convey the stillness of it. All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives—all that was over. As the darkness thickened, the eddying flakes grew more abundant, dancing before my eyes; and the cold of the air more intense. At last, one by one, swiftly, one after the other, the white peaks of the distant hills vanished into blackness. The breeze rose to a moaning wind. I saw the black central shadow of the eclipse sweeping towards me. In another moment the pale stars alone were visible. All else was rayless obscurity. The sky was absolutely black. (*Time Machine* 85)

For Bernard Bergonzi, ‘this vision of a dying world is conveyed with a poetic intensity which Wells was never to recapture’ (*Early H. G. Wells* 59). The eclipse that plunges the Traveller’s surroundings into darkness becomes analogous for the entirety of the gradual process of solar heat-death which brings absolute blackness to the world, condensed into a single powerful vision. This passage articulates a broader *fin-de-siècle*

cultural malaise, shaping bleak and pessimistic visions of the future that found expression in accounts of the dying solar system.

Towards the end of Flammarion's *Omega*, the sun is 'a dark ball, the planets also; and still this invisible system sped on in the glacial cold of starry space' (270). The death of humanity and its planet is irrelevant to the progress of the universe. Yet descriptions of the cosmic process can only be defined in terms of human understanding and perception. 'The solar system [is] annihilated, time itself suspended': suspended because no humans are left to experience it (*Omega* 271). In a similar way, the Recluse realises that 'The sun was dying; of that there could be little doubt; and still the earth whirled onward, through space and all the aeons' (*House* 172). The dead solar system becomes 'invisible', like Swithin's 'black invisible cinders' and Byron's 'blind' earth; although there are no human eyes left to know whether it is visible or not, the imagination is drawn into an impossible attempt to imagine total darkness, black against black. The invisibility of the entropic solar system emphasises human insignificance and futility: the worst thing about living beyond the end of the sun is the darkness.

'Eternal night': darkness and disorientation

Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night.

Algernon Charles Swinburne 'The Garden of Proserpine' (1866)

As a borderland between living and dying, movement and stillness, 'eternal night' seems to encapsulate the crux of what is most dreadful about the end of the solar system. 'Light!' cries the Recluse in *The House on the Borderland*, 'One must spend an eternity wrapped in soundless night, to understand the full horror of being without it' (177). 'The future was eternal night', writes Flammarion in *Omega*, while in *The Night Land*, as 'Eternal Night lengthened itself upon the world, the power of terror grew and strengthened' (46). The vision of an eternity of darkness expresses the horror of both the infinite time and infinite space of the universe.

In *Thomas Hardy's Novel Universe*, Pamela Gossin lists 'four forms of astronomical terror' identified by Anna Henchman:

1) numerical loneliness, owing to 'the discovery that the sun is only one in a galaxy of an estimated 300 million stars'; 2) fear of emptiness, because the universe seems to be 'both devoid of a divine presence and literally made up of "deep wells of nothingness"' as Hardy put it; 3) fear of universal decay, as the sun and all 'fixed' stars will one day, in Hardy's words, 'burn out like candles' and, 4) epistemological fear, as 'astronomy forces its practitioners to confront irresolvable conflicts between sensory perception and abstract knowledge'. (Gossin 80)

These four terrors are brought to the forefront in these eschatological texts: the earth is exposed as an insignificant body spinning in a universe which has been stripped of religious consolation. The Recluse, for example, 'realised, despairingly, that the world might wander forever, through that enormous night. For a while, the unwholesome idea filled me, with a sensation of overbearing desolation; so that I could have cried like a child' (*House* 176). His sense of insignificance, purposelessness, and the size and

emptiness of the universe overwhelm him. A fifth form of astronomical terror might be described as the fear of time: of infinite plot without humanity.

In *Two on a Tower*, the starless and therefore black parts of the sky are the most frightening parts of it. As Swithin tells Viviette, ‘there are things much more terrible than monsters of shape; namely, monsters of magnitude without known shape. Such monsters are the voids and waste places of the sky’ (Hardy 33-4). Furthermore, the size of the stellar universe equates to ‘ghastliness’ and astronomers ‘merely strain their faculties to gain a new horror’ (34). Anne DeWitt links Swithin’s ‘horror of the actual sky’ to ‘its magnitude, its formlessness, and the emptiness evoked by the voids and interspaces between the stars’, and his perception of these voids as ‘waste places’, to the idea of wasted energy that accompanied the debate over entropy (DeWitt 496). It was known that energy did not disappear from the universe, but became unusable, and therefore waste places are sinks of useless energy: what our own solar system will ultimately become. In the night lands of dying earth fiction the horror of entropy is brought home: entropy is signalled by the loss of light, by the approach of darkness. In *The Night Land*, we are told, the intrusion of evil forces into the world ‘must surely have begun in the Days of Darkening’; in other words, evil horrors are catalysed by the darkness caused by the death of the sun (44).

In *The Time Machine*, the Time Traveller describes sensations of sickness during time travel, which Paul Alkon calls ‘existential nausea’, symbolising ‘the human predicament in a meaningless universe’ (Alkon 53-4). The Time Traveller again experiences sickness as he watches the final eclipse, overwhelmed by the immensity of time and space, the insignificance of humanity, and horror of the cold, the darkness, and the silence: ‘A horror of this great darkness came on me. ... I felt I was fainting. But a terrible dread of lying helpless in that remote and awful twilight sustained me’ (*Time Machine* 85). Crucially, it is while he struggles to cope with the sickening horror of the advancing darkness that he observes the last remnant of animal life on the planet:

As I stood sick and confused I saw again the moving thing upon the shoal ...
a round thing, the size of a football perhaps, or, it may be, bigger, and
tentacles trailed down from it; it seemed black against the weltering blood-
red water, and it was hopping fitfully about. (65)

The creature hops 'fitfully', an entropic form lacking strength or energy; like the planet, it is animal life in its dying throes. While Targ and Omegar die in the knowledge of being the last humans on the planet, the Time Traveller lives to confront the possibility that his own species will end ignominiously

The Time Traveller's horror of confronting the great darkness is echoed in *The House on the Borderland*. The Recluse reports that

everywhere and always there reigned an incredible death-silence and
desolation. The immutable, awful quiet of a dying world. ...the sky had
become black, with a clear, deep blackness, frightful in its nearness, and
its unmeasured deep, and its utter unfriendliness. For a great time, I looked
into it, newly, and shaken and fearful. (174)

The Recluse is fascinated, gazing on the scene 'for a great time'. Similarly the people of the Great Redoubt are fascinated by the 'black monstrosity' of the Night Land and watch it continually: 'on none did it ever come with weariness to look out upon all the hideous mysteries' (38). They are fascinated by the horror, by the mystery, and are obsessed with their own end, since to look upon the Night Land is to look upon humanity's eventual destruction by darkness and monstrosity.

The Night Land generates the same sense of loneliness and dread in the people of the future as the darkness of space does in the Recluse and Swithin. The 'lost darkness'

of the world means that communication with the Lesser Redoubt is as wondrous as though ‘a man in this present day to have speech with those who may live within that red planet of Mars’ and ‘as though we in this age called to a star across the abyss of space’ (61, 65). The Night Land is as vast, dark, and mysterious as the night sky, and the Great Redoubt is a giant observatory. At the top of the pyramid is the ‘Tower of Observation’, equipped with powerful telescopes, and ‘each human had a spying-glass’ as well as access to many vast ‘Camera Obscura’ big enough for ten thousand people (86-7). Like Swithin’s astronomers, the people of the Great Redoubt ‘merely strain their faculties to gain a new horror’.

In *The Night Land* Hodgson brings entropy, despair, and darkness together as the inevitable result of resisting the cosmic process. The Night Land is a world to which humans no longer belong, and the sunlit world is no more than a dubious myth, meaning that humans are essentially homeless and dispossessed in what is no longer their natural environment. In *Being and Time* (1926), Martin Heidegger discusses the sense of anxiety and uncertainty that is one of the states of Being-in-the-world, his term for the state of human existence. ‘In anxiety,’ says Heidegger, ‘one feels *uncanny* [unheimlich]. ... But here uncanniness [unheimlichkeit] also means “not-being-at-home”’ (233, H. 188). For Heidegger, ‘Being-at-home’ is the ‘tranquillized familiarity’ which is threatened by the uncanny; the uncanny threatens to expose us to the world and as ‘Everyday familiarity collapses... Being-in enters into ‘the existential “mode” of the “not-at-home”’. Nothing else is meant by our talk about “uncanniness”’ (233, H. 189). Heidegger’s concept can be applied to the struggle of Hodgson’s humans to maintain their sense of belonging to the world.

In *The Architectural Uncanny*, Anthony Vidler describes how the uncanny expresses experiences of feeling ‘unhomely’, of feeling dispossessed or out-of-place:

For Heidegger, the *unheimlich*... [was] a question of the fundamental condition of anxiety in the world—the way in which the world was experienced as ‘not a home’. ... everyone feels fundamentally unsettled (*unheimlich*), that is, senses that human beings can never be at home in the world. This, according to Heidegger, is why we plunge into trying to make ourselves at home and secure. (Vidler 7-8)

In these terms, the experience of the humans in *The Night Land* can be understood as a struggle to create a meaningful home in their borderland state, in a future world to which they do not naturally belong. They are not an evolutionary product of the age and environment in which they live; their world is unfamiliar and security is their primary goal. As a result they live inside a protective fortress and spend their lives studying and mapping the land around them in an effort to understand it. They place themselves and their Great Redoubt at the centre of the map in an attempt to redefine humanity’s importance in an indifferent world.

Darkness and the loss of the sense of sight produces anxiety, insecurity and disorientation. Freud’s predecessor, Ernst Jentsch, argued in ‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny’ (1906) that ‘Without a doubt, [*unheimlich*] seems to express that someone to whom something uncanny happens is not quite “at home” or “at ease” in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him. In brief, the word suggests that a *lack of orientation* is bound up with the impression of the uncanniness of a thing or incident’ (Jentsch 8). According to Freud, Jentsch ‘ascribes the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one’s way about in. The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it’ (Freud ‘The Uncanny’ 221). This definition did not satisfy Freud, but it is useful for understanding

how X experiences the Night Land. The sense of orientation generated by mapping counters the uncanny experience of ‘not-being-at-home’, which is akin to being lost.

On his journey X is able to navigate the Night Land because of his knowledge of its features, the use of a compass that points towards the Great Redoubt (attracted by the magnetism of the Earth-Current), and because of the light that the pyramid sheds over the land, a light augmented by the glow of various volcanic ‘fire-holes’. As X sets off,



‘A Shining Peak’
© Stephen Fabian

he looks back at the Great Redoubt and its shining embrasures:

A great light came out from them into the darkness; so that I looked up into the night many miles, and yet did see them in shining rows ... as a constant glimmering fire, that did shape a shining Peak into the blackness of the heavens. (*Night Land* 123)⁶⁰

The light of the Great Redoubt allows X to orientate himself navigationally and

psychologically. However, he is forced to confront the darkness when his journey takes him down a ‘Mighty Slope’ into blackness:

And you shall perceive how utter lost and lonesome I did feel. ... I saw now that the Night Land that I did wot of, was hid from me by the slope.

⁶⁰ This image irresistibly suggests the Egyptian Pyramid of Giza; before its polished casing stones were removed, it would have been ‘visible for many miles as a “golden mountain” (hence its Egyptian name “the light”) ... in the sunlight, the pyramid cast visible reflections within the air and on the sand’ (Lemesurier 10).

And I turned and looked down the slope; and surely all before me was utter wildness of a dark desolation; for it did seem to go nowhither but into an everlasting night. And there was no fire down there, neither light of any kind; but only Darkness and, as I did feel, Eternity. (201)

For the first time, X is fundamentally disorientated, 'utter lost'. It is not a monster or a spiritual horror that makes him hesitate, but the fear of the dark unknown. At the end of six days of walking and crawling in blackness, he spies 'a little shining'. This is his first glimpse of the bright and fertile Country of Fire and Water, and causes 'a pain of hope... so that I grew sick in all my being but to behold once again the blessedness of light' (214). For X, the existential sickness caused by the dark is triggered by hope: the possibility of a return to light.

Light represents literal orientation for X because by it he can find his way home. The 'little shining' also suggests a spark of energy beginning to renew life. Meaningful human experience depends on existing in a world in which they feel at home and to which they are suited. *The Night Land* explores the psychological affects of living in a hostile and inhuman world. As Chapter Three has argued, darkness turns the Night Land into an unreal and ambiguous borderland, as vast, overwhelming, and disorientating as being lost in space, echoing Victorian *fin-de-siècle* anxiety over the prospect of the future. Significance is crushed out of human existence by the 'Void' of eternal night, yet it can be revived by the tiniest 'shining' of light.

Rejuvenation and consolation

The optimistic hope of rejuvenation of the universe existed well before *fin-de-siècle* discoveries in radioactivity. In *Omega*, Flammarion describes the future regeneration of the universe: 'new worlds were born... new civilisations, new vanities' (286).

Radioactivity, however, gave this hope a new expression. According to Frederick Soddy, humans

are no longer the inhabitants of a universe slowly dying from the physical exhaustion of its energy, but of a universe which has in the internal energy of its material components the means to rejuvenate itself perennially over immense periods of time... These possibilities of a newer order of things, of a more exalted material destiny than any which have been foretold, are not the promise of another world. They exist in this, to be wrung from the grip of Nature. (*Interpretation of Radium* 248, 252).

For Hodgson, publishing *The Night Land* in 1912, but writing its initial drafts perhaps as early as 1898, this means that his ideas fall between the influential theories of William Thomson and the results of the study of radioactivity by Rutherford and Soddy. *The Night Land* was written in a time of flux in ideas about the future history of the earth. The closest X gets to identifying the date of his future vision is an observation that ‘the histories of that great Redoubt dealt not with odd thousands of years; but with very millions; away, away back... when the sun, maybe, still gloomed dully in the night sky of the world. But of all that went before, nothing, save as myths’ (39). If ‘very millions’ may be taken to imply less than tens or hundreds of millions, then the history of our planet, as *The Night Land* shows it, can fit within the several million years calculated by Thomson.⁶¹

The Time Machine suggests a steady decline from post-Victorian utopia through Eloi and Morlock to the black hopping thing on the dark shore, and the primal emergence of lower organisms from the sea is reversed into an ultimate decline into

⁶¹ Andy Robertson also makes this assumption in his timeline (‘The Night Land: Night Times - a Suggested Timeline’).
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slime. *The Night Land*, however, offers not only a revival of the primal world in the warm, forested valleys within the earth's crust, but a revival of the human spirit in the evolving Humped Men who inhabit them. The volcanic vitality of the Country of Fire and Water suggests a planet which has, in Soddy's words, 'in the internal energy of its material components the means to rejuvenate itself'. In contrast to the silence that horrifies the Time Traveller, the whole Country has 'a constant Voice of the Energy of Life, so that the World-Noise of this our age was even there again, and with a keen and undoubted apparentness' (*Night Land* 225). The air is seems thick and rich, and the fire-hills are so considerable 'that they did seem to make strange and smouldering suns within the night'. With water, and heat, the only thing missing from a regenerative ecosystem is sunlight; and here the landscape has provided a volcanic substitute.

Moreover, this rejuvenation could be part of a pattern. An ancient metal history book, found by X in the Great Redoubt's records, tells of a much earlier geological apocalypse, a cataclysm splitting a 'Mighty Chasm' in the earth's surface which over time becomes a 'deep and wondrous valley, that did hold Seas and great Hills ... and Lands that were good and healthful', and which is 'once more the Primal World born to give new birth unto such olden monsters, and to others, new and Peculiar to that Age and Circumstance' (*Night Land* 128-9). This world exists some hundreds of thousands of years before the Great Redoubt is built. The valley is populated by the people known as the Road Makers, until the increasingly 'gloomy light' of the 'twilight of the world' leads to the collapse of their civilisation and the eventual founding of the Great Redoubt (130). This sequence suggests a cycle of periodic resurgence of vitality within the earth, revitalisations which have happened before, and may happen again. How lasting or 'perennial' this chain of rejuvenations might be is questionable, but the influence of this new view of the universe, not available to Wells when he wrote *The Time Machine*, contributes to the expressions of optimism about the survival of 'proper' human life present in *The Night Land* and not in *The Time Machine*. As Chapter Seven will show,

both Flammarion and Hodgson were also positively affected by the consolations offered by Victorian spiritualism, which did not influence Wells.

The Night Land negotiates differing, if not entirely conflicting, views on the future of the planet. On the one hand, the inhabitants of the Great Redoubt wait passively during an '[e]ternity of quiet watching for the days when the Earth-Current shall become exhausted' and the world is 'full of lawlessness and degeneracy' (45, 44). On the other hand, however, X imagines that humans might actively find 'a new space of life' in 'that warm country' (424). So appealing is the Country of Fire and Water that the narrator daydreams about it: 'in some far-off time, it might be that our children's children should come down unto this country... and here build them a new Refuge', although this depends on successful escape from the Watchers (242).

According to X's metal history book, this is the valley that the human wanderers deserted in favour of building the pyramid in its current position over the source of the Earth-Current. This suggests that although this valley seems much more desirable and habitable, it is not a place for humans. The habitat created here is not one which humans are destined to occupy; it is for the new species of a regenerated world. As Wells warned, 'Nature is, in unsuspected obscurity, equipping some now humble creature with wider possibilities of appetite, endurance, or destruction, to rise in the fulness [sic] of time and sweep *homo* away into the darkness from which his universe rose' ('Zoological Retrogression' 168). Rosny's ferromagnetics are such a species, while the title of Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* points to the replacement of humans as the destiny of the superior Vril-ya.

Jefferies' *After London*, Gillian Beer notes, is 'haunted by extinction, by the throttling power of a few dominant species, and the loss of varieties in the wild state' (143). Similarly, the new species of the Night Land, including the giant monstrous, predatory Watchers gathered patiently around the Great Redoubt, are slowly throttling the human remnants with their superior adaptation and their greater likelihood of

species survival. Except for humans, all the familiar species of our time have been driven to extinction by the new adapting mutations, which override the old variations. In the Sargasso Sea, and in the Night Land, Hodgson's humans encounter a series of better-equipped creatures: be-tentacled 'men' suited to the weed-world; a new primal race of Humped Men to continue the plot long after the humans of the Great Redoubt are extinct. Humans face not only extinction caused by a hostile environment or the superiority of a monstrous species, but also being usurped by a product of convergent evolution—an upstart humankind.

The Humped Men, however, are presented almost as worthy successors. X believes that that the 'Spirit of the Human' exists in whatever shape evolution requires of it: man 'did be once modified physically to his need, and to be still possessed of the Man-Spirit, though all lackt of development' (*Night Land* 522). The new order of things in *The Night Land* means that a new order of humans may be able to evolve in this world without the support of the Earth-Current. *The Night Land* juxtaposes the ultimate futility of humanity's survival in the twilight of the world with continual resurgences of hope; a borderland hovering between survival and extinction. X's discovery of the hitherto unknown Country of Fire and Water indicates the importance of continuing to strive and search for new resources and new possibilities of rejuvenation, while on an individual level, furthermore, the value of continued existence to the humans of the Great Redoubt is justified by love, the underpinning motivation of X's story.

Conclusion

This chapter's examination of *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland* in the context of nineteenth-century responses to entropy and evolution is one of several ways of understanding Hodgson's unusual and visionary texts. Gossin points out that scholars of astronomical history and literature 'have over-simplified that cosmological choices available to literary writers', which in fact form a challenging 'interpretative maze'

(Gossin 23). *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland* are complex novels on the borders of multiple ‘cosmological choices’; other influences include the Theosophical and occult views of the cosmos. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Astral Light of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn influences Hodgson’s portrayal of other worlds. Additionally, Manichean dualism influences the presentation of the Night Land as a borderland of conflict between good and evil, and Theosophy provides a source of ideas about reincarnation, elemental spirits, and the cosmology of the Central Sun, which for Blavatsky provides both a physical and a spiritual centre for the universe and is reflected in the account of the Recluse’s journey in *The House on the Borderland*.

This chapter, however, has attempted to place Hodgson’s novels in the context of Victorian and *fin-de-siècle* responses to evolutionary theory as it was understood alongside the implications of the laws of thermodynamics. These responses include not only apocalyptic visions of the end of the world in ice and extinction but also the consolations offered by spiritualist ideas about the survival of souls in a materialistic universe, as Chapter Seven discusses. They also include the possibilities for cosmic rejuvenation offered by thermodynamics, and, later, by radioactivity. However, the complexities of *The Night Land* push these questions further, placing extinction and rejuvenation side by side and speculating on the possibilities for human survival in either context.

In the bleak imagined future caused by a cooling sun, Hodgson asks, how might humankind firstly survive and, secondly, still have a purpose. The first is answered by his Earth-Current-underpinned ‘utopia’ of technology, psychic unity, cleanliness, and social discipline; the second by eternal love, the suggestion of higher powers, and the revival of the human spirit in other forms. Both are also answered by adversity: to avoid the life of over-ease that brought humans into decline in *The Time Machine*, Hodgson’s world is full of terrors, strange forces brought into contact with our world, or monsters created by evolution. He presents a sunless future borderland which holds both

extinction and life, collapsed and rebuilt civilisations, degenerate and ‘proper’ bodies. By setting a sustainable human civilisation within an entropic world Hodgson is able to explore two myths of the future simultaneously: the potential effects of the relentless processes of evolution and entropy, and the optimism of humanity’s ability to resist them.

By striving against these constantly hostile forces and by the moral strengthening of the Earth-Current, Hodgson’s humans avoid feebleness through security; their strength is the outcome of need. Nevertheless, their united feelings and mutual fascination with the Night Land mean that they can never feel secure living within it; despite their refuge they live exposed to its threats. This is ultimately the threat of entropy: in a dark and entropic borderland world, humans struggle to live normally. To resist entropy is also to resist psychological despair as the human race survives in a world to which it has not physically adapted and to which it no longer belongs in the natural order of things. *The Night Land* answers the pessimism of both *The Time Machine* and *The Death of the Earth* by resisting psychological entropy through spiritualist principles and the philosophy of eternal love, as well as through its pattern of planetary rejuvenation. The purpose of the next chapter is to explore this philosophy and the strategies Hodgson uses in *The Night Land* to promote the future of humanity and resist the cosmic process.

Chapter Seven

Borderlands of the future: physical and spiritual menace and promise in *The Night Land*

Chapters Five and Six have discussed *The Night Land* in the contexts of bodily evolution and cosmic entropy. This chapter turns to an examination of the civilisation built by Hodgson in the dark borderlands of the distant future. Through the society of the Great Redoubt Hodgson negotiates the boundaries of many strands of *fin-de-siècle* thought: utopian, socialist, imperialist, spiritualist, evolutionary. Hodgson seeks a reconciliation of these disparate discourses through exploration of their common goals, which included a desire to improve, sustain, or reinvigorate the human race, however that was defined and however they envisioned the best method. Hodgson attempts to reach an underlying philosophy that answers, for him, some of the prevailing concerns of the *fin de siècle*: degeneration and national fitness, species survival in an entropic universe, and the loss of religious and spiritual faith that accompanied the advance of nineteenth-century scientific materialism. Hodgson's effort to reconcile these conflicting truths takes him to the imaginative borderlands of science fiction in which his ideas can be played out to their full. This chapter examines the social, scientific, and spiritual ideas that make up the philosophical core of Hodgson's final epic.

The civilisation imagined by Hodgson in *The Night Land* goes beyond novels like *Omega* and *The Time Machine* because it depicts a scenario in which the human race has outlived the sun. As we have seen in Chapter Six, evolutionary forces in Hodgson's vision of earth's future operate relentlessly, but his humans have found ways to

withstand the twin threats of destruction and degeneration. They seem to have fulfilled Huxley's hopes of progress against the flow of the cosmic process: threats of the Night Land aside, they live in an internally contented, utopian society founded on 'sound Principles' and laws 'framed to the well-being and safety of all' (*Night Land* 85); they have advanced technology making use of that versatile power source, the Earth-Current; and they have developed the psychic functions of their 'brain-elements'. Hodgson's humans have evolved socially, technically, and psychically in an apparently progressive direction, which has ensured the success of the species despite their lack of physical competitiveness in a dying world.

However, this success has also necessitated compromises. The strictures of a collectivist social system adversely affect individual freedoms, and psychic evolution is accompanied by atavistic tendencies to lack of creativity and individuality. Despite these drawbacks, the Great Redoubt's rules, aimed at maintaining the physical and genetic cleanliness of the human race, are presented as necessary. Two disasters reinforce this: the doomed attempt of the five hundred youths to mount a rescue mission, and the fall of the Lesser Redoubt to 'Evil Forces' and 'great and horrid monsters' (*Night Land* 288). The Lesser Redoubt's end offers a picture of the ultimate inevitable fate of the Great Redoubt. Despite the consciousness of eventual doom, however, X and Naani's story values individual achievement alongside the success of the social system.

This chapter will begin by considering the Great Redoubt as a fortress shielding the human race from corruption and degeneration, and exploring its attitudes towards discipline, difference, and purity. The strict laws, as much as the physical walls, are designed to protect human civilisation, while the novel exhibits a paranoia about difference and aberrance, seen to pose a degenerative threat to human fitness and purity. Hodgson's novel provides a myth of national fitness to counter a *fin-de-siècle* mood of concern about the defective conditions of modern life in late nineteenth-century Britain.

Hodgson further underpins his ideal of physical strength with psychical evolution, seen by many spiritualists and psychical researchers as the natural progressive evolutionary destiny of the human species. This argument runs counter to the *fin-de-siècle* pessimism of writers like Nordau who saw degeneration as inevitable, reflecting both Hodgson's own philosophy and his position as a writer shaped by both the optimism and pessimism of the period.

Lastly, Hodgson addresses the spiritual malaise of the *fin de siècle* with a philosophy of the cosmos as the grounds of a struggle between naturalised forces of good and evil in which humanity can find spiritual consolation in the hope of eternal souls. In Hodgson's philosophy, heaven and divine powers are replaced by natural forces of goodness and survival of souls after death. These mystical elements of Hodgson's vision—the existence of higher powers with an interest in humanity's preservation, the promise of purpose to individual lives through the reincarnation of souls—work to provide humanity with a reason for continuing to exist in a doomed world. Hodgson viewed *The Night Land* as his great work, and in it he attempts to unify his eclectic array of evolutionary, spiritual, and philosophical inspiration.

'A Determined Generation': the ethical process, normalisation, and degeneration

Huxley argued that it was possible for the human species to direct a course against the implications of the 'cosmic process', the relentless mechanisms of the universe.⁶² The result would be 'not the survival of those who may happen to be the fittest, in respect of the whole of the conditions which obtain, but of those who are ethically the best... the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in

⁶² Wells acknowledged a great debt to Huxley, recalling that 'That year I spent in Huxley's class was, beyond all question, the most educational year of my life' (*Experiment in Autobiography* 201).

running away from it, but in combating it' ('Evolution and Ethics' 81-3). Through such 'ethical evolution', Huxley saw 'no limit to the extent to which intelligence and will, guided by sound principles of investigation, and organized in the common effort, may modify the conditions of existence for a period longer than that now covered by history' (85). Although there is no escaping the world's cosmological end, Huxley saw humanity as nevertheless capable of ensuring its extended survival and resisting the potential for degeneration contained in the cosmic process of evolution. Ethical evolution was a social as well as a biological process, and called for social change if it was to succeed.

Instead of adaptation, Hodgson's humans have employed Huxley's principles and established the 'proper' human as the species that is 'ethically the best' rather than the species best fitted to the environment. While outside the Great Redoubt degenerate 'tribes of half-human monsters' have evolved to suit the changing environment of a dying planet, the 'proper' humans have maintained their physical and genetic integrity inside the pyramid despite evolutionary pressures (*Night Land* 62).⁶³ The Great Redoubt stands for the human species as a whole, while the Night Land represents the ever-present threat of moral and genetic degeneration: the contamination of the human species not simply through slime and problematic shapes as Chapter Five discusses, but also through 'shameful' activities and monstrous interbreeding (131). The internal workings of the Great Redoubt are a reaction to these twin threats, bound up with the discourse of *fin-de-siècle* degeneration theory. By the time of X's story, resisting the cosmic process of evolution and environmental adaptation means protecting the human genome at all costs, since to give in to evolutionary pressures will now inevitably mean becoming a monstrous degenerate. In the utopia of the Great Redoubt humans are at a peak of physical, technological, and mental powers, treading a borderline between

⁶³ The conflict between the humans and the monsters that periodically attack the pyramid also reveals *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about foreign invasion, expressed in texts such as *The Battle of Dorking*, *Dracula* and *The War of the Worlds*.

resisting monstrous degeneracy and slipping Eloi-like, as they had once before, into a ‘softness of Heart and Spirit through many ages of over-ease’ (129).

Maintaining the human genome requires the commitment of the whole species, since even the introduction of one aberrant, like Naani, as we will see, could put civilisation at risk. Huxley’s ethical process of evolution required cooperation for the good of society:

it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows; its influence is directed, not so much to survival of the fittest, as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive. ... It demands that each man who entered into the enjoyment of the advantages of a polity shall be mindful of his debt to those who constructed it; and shall take heed that no act of his weakens the fabric in which he has been permitted to live. Laws and moral precepts are directed to the end of curbing the cosmic process and reminding the individual of his duty to the community. (‘Evolution and Ethics’ 82)

Huxley describes a social model based on mutual cooperation rather than individual struggle, in which membership is a privilege and a responsibility incurring a ‘debt’ of ‘duty’, and whose ‘laws and moral precepts’ govern a single predetermined goal. This is Wells’s model in *A Modern Utopia* as well as Hodgson’s in *The Night Land*: individual freedoms are gladly sacrificed for the greater gains of society and the species. ‘In an organized state,’ writes Wells, ‘each one of us... limits others by his rights, and is limited by the rights of others’ (*Modern Utopia* 29). ‘Life has not space enough’ muses X in a moment of regret for the freedom to choose companions, given the size of the Great Redoubt and the constraints of duty: ‘each must to his duty to the security and well-being of the Redoubt’ (*Night Land* 51). The result, inevitably, of this requirement

is an organised state, in which everyone obeys the same rules and works towards the common good.

William Greenslade notes that by the 1900s ‘the doctrine of efficiency had become the new century’s version of a spiritual and moral regeneration’ (*Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel* 194). Wells’s efficient society would be an organised world state, liberated by the rational application of science and technology, and run by a scientific elite, as in *A Modern Utopia*.⁶⁴ In *When the Sleeper Wakes* and ‘A Story of the Days to Come’ (1897), efficient organisation takes the form of a technologised city. For Wells, Mark Hillegas notes, the ‘giant mechanical city’ represents ‘the victory of the city over the land’ (*Future as Nightmare* 107). For Hodgson, the giant mechanical pyramid (technologised inside with moving roadways and elevators) contains the efficient human civilisation operating regardless of the chaos outside the walls. The megalopolis represents human control over the natural world and thus symbolises humanity’s defiance of the cosmic process. The walls of the megalopolis define the limits of humanity’s artificial control both over environment and over their own evolution. They form a clear boundary marking off the efficient and regulated Great Redoubt from the disorderly influence of the Night Land.

Hodgson’s Great Redoubt follows the Wellsian utopia in several ways: its elite Monstruwacans, its labour-saving technology, its megalopolitan structure. However, like *When the Sleeper Wakes*, it also anticipates the dystopian cities of the later twentieth century in its proto-fascist strictness, its paranoia about the world outside, and the subjugation of individuality to social stability.⁶⁵ Steven McLean identifies a conflict between individuality and collectivism in the utopian ideals of Wells, whose ‘attempt to

⁶⁴ Wells joined the Fabian Society in 1903 but fell out with its leaders in 1909 over fundamental disagreements about the society’s direction, described by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie in *The Time Traveller: The Life of H.G. Wells*.

⁶⁵ See Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare* for an analysis of Wells’s influence on Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and Orwell, and Wagar, *H. G. Wells: Traversing Time* for the importance of *When the Sleeper Wakes* to the utopian tradition.

reconcile the unhindered cultivation of individuality with social efficiency... exposes contradictions in *A Modern Utopia*' (McLean 186). The difficulty of resolving the incompatibility of individuality and the common good is a perennial problem of the literary utopia and the perhaps inevitable result of adopting the efficient structure of the megalopolis. William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, for example, eschews cities in favour of a free artistic and pastoral socialism.

The Great Redoubt has protected the purity of the human race for many eras, and X's metal book tells of

an Age of Sorrows and Fightings, and Hardenings of the Spirit and of the Heart, for all that were of good Fibre; and this did breed a Determined Generation; and there grew up into the World a Leader; and he took all the sound Millions; and did make a might Battle upon all Foulness and upon all that did harm and trouble them. (*Night Land* 131)

This racial cleansing has resulted in a distinction of 'good Fibre' from bad, selecting a healthy population that can maintain the identity of the human ideal (Hurley 'Modernist Abominations' 140). Moreover, these 'sound Millions' are not a randomly chosen group; they are a 'Determined Generation' that has been bred from the 'good Fibre' into strength and hardiness.

This distinction suggests that from then on, a passive eugenic policy must be employed to maintain the genome internally while strict discipline prevents external contamination. Eugenicist Francis Galton had distinguished between 'positive' and 'negative' eugenics: between encouraging breeding among 'good' stock and discouraging it amongst 'bad' (Galton 34). The establishment of the Great Redoubt is an act of separation, removing the 'sound Millions' from the process of natural selection by sealing themselves against any risk of genetic contamination by the misshapen

specimens outside the walls. Circumstances such as these hint at *The Night Land's* imperialist subtext, with the colonial humans avoiding integration with the native races. As a result, however, the 'vacant space' outside the pyramid accordingly becomes crowded with the degenerate progeny of the non-'sound'.

Sound human bodies are maintained in the Great Redoubt, while, as we will see in the next section, degenerative tendencies are 'corrected' or jettisoned. X 'did be always in affection of the Exercises that were taught in the Upbringing of all the People of the Might Pyramid ... but indeed I owed the straightness and shaping of my body to the Mother that bore me' (355). X's shapeliness is due to his inherited genes, and enhanced by the discipline of exercise: he is a model for, or of, his physical culture-obsessed author. As Hurley notes, physical culture, 'with its emphasis on the discipline and training of the body, was a crucial tool in the project of race regeneration, to be used to bolster military preparedness as well as to check the physical deterioration of the degenerate European', and to reinforce proper masculinity ('Modernist Abominations' 140). Like Hodgson, the Great Redoubt values the strong body, which demonstrates both physical and genetic fitness for the survival of the human race. This emphasis again hints at British imperialism, requiring physically fit bodies to defend its interests.

However, variations within the 'sound' gene pool are allowable if they are obviously to human advantage, such as the evolution of psychic abilities. The pyramid is so tall that the air in the upper levels is rarefied, and the people of the Upper Cities have larger chests than in the Lower Cities. In the past, a plan to move the population up and down around the pyramid to eradicate this tendency had been discarded because it met with 'great disfavour', indicating a degree of democracy in the community as well as a tolerance of reasonable variations. Humanity, X suggests, is as much about essentials as shape: as Chapter Six describes, he believes that in earlier evolutionary stages primitive humanity still had the 'Man-Spirit', while Chapter Five has shown that the most abominable forms register an innate monstrosity. The 'sound millions' of the Great

Redoubt must have adapted from the era of X's first life to suit dim light and volcanic air, but their human spirit is present regardless of these changes. X senses 'proper' humanity in the Humped Men as well as abhuman abomination in the Grey Man of his first battle, for example. Both humanity and monstrosity are more than skin deep.

Outside in the Night Land, however, the fear of external miscegenation and contamination is so acute that it extends to bodily and alimantal cleanliness as well as the protection of genetic purity.⁶⁶ The rules about who can leave the Great Redoubt and under what conditions are extremely strict, for example around the ingestion of food and water. The narrator is supplied with tablets in place of food, a sort of precursor to Tolkien 'lembas' which sustains him in minute quantities and keeps his soul 'sweet and wholesome' (*Fellowship of the Ring* 485; *Night Land* 199). He also carries water in the form of a powder which reacts with the air to create liquid, and knows by 'instinct' that he should eat nothing but the tablets, 'even as you shall not tell a grown man in this Age that he shall refrain from dung, and eat only wholesome matter' (427). However, despite this apparently instinctive repugnance, when he finds Naani, she has been sustaining herself on sulphur water, moss, and 'odd strange berries and growths', risking poisoning (290). This activity recalls the unfortunate castaways of 'The Voice in the Night', compelled to eat the fungus that contaminates and transforms their bodies. The injunction against eating has, perhaps, to do with the inferiority of the products of the Night Land because, like Naani herself, it is not 'fructified' by the Earth-Current and may thus have the power to poison or corrupt. As Hurley points out in a discussion of Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, '[d]irt, disorder, impurity... serve to delineate more firmly the taxonomies they violate' (*Gothic Body* 25). Naani's disregard of alimantal cleanliness violates an 'instinctive' taboo and aligns her on the wrong side of the border between purity and contamination.

⁶⁶ See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* for a discussion of the cultural functions of unclean substances.

A similar attitude is directed at the dirt of the Night Land, of which X and Naani have an acute disgust. After his battle with the Yellow Thing, X is covered in muck and ‘saw that I should not have comfort of heart, until I was washed clean from the taint of the Monster’ (176). Similarly, after the battle with the Slug-Beast in the gorge, Naani is ‘in a pitiful disgust of the dirt and slime and the drippings of the Gorge, that did be on her, and had made her garment utter wet and beslimed, so that she did feel that her very body was a repulse unto her’ (390). As Chapter Five has discussed, the slime of monsters puts humans in an abject condition, contaminated by the excretions of chaotic, tainted bodies. The novel’s obsession with physical purity is symbolised by the individual bodily consumption of, and contamination by, polluted substances. The disruption of the boundaries between human and animal takes place in the bodies of X and Naani through the abjection caused by muck and slime, and the potential abjection of unclean foodstuffs. This condition is created by the walls and rules of the Great Redoubt as much as it is kept at bay. To stray into the unclean borderland of the Night Land is to be reminded of how easily the boundaries of the human self can collapse. As we will see, this has important implications for the Great Redoubt’s attitude to potential degenerative influences from beyond its borders.

‘Infernal sharks’: predation and protection around the Great Redoubt

The Great Redoubt, nearly eight miles high, protects humans from a world hostile both in environment and in its other inhabitants. The world outside is dark and cold, because of the death of the sun and the gradual entropy of the planet’s heat, but is also volcanically active, because the Night Land is positioned deep in the earth’s crust. The volcanic heat and water of the planet’s core and crust support the Night Land’s organic life: bushes and even trees, aggressive Humped Men, giant Slug-Beasts, and the occasional harmless herbivore. As Chapter Five has discussed, some of these creatures

have evolved to suit the conditions of life in the entropic world, and some are the result

of degeneration and miscegenation during a period of ‘lawlessness’ in the era before the Great Redoubt was built: ‘lost races of terrible creatures, half men and half beast, and evil and dreadful’ (*Night Land* 45).⁶⁷ The abominable descendents of these unions still roam the Night Land and are among the monstrous beings encountered by X on his journey, such as the ‘man-monster filled of unwholesome life’ near the Lesser Redoubt (322). These monsters may be understood in terms of discourses of degeneration and imperialism, which ‘define a normative social body by virtue of its distinction from the “unsound” bodies found at the peripheries of the Empire’ (Hurley ‘Modernist Abominations’ 142). *The Night Land*’s imperialist undercurrent means that as well as representing monstrous or regressive humanity, the terrible creatures surrounding the Great Redoubt also represent these unstable peripheral bodies opposed to the civilised centre of the British Empire. However, the risks posed by unregulated scientific experimentation give a third meaning to these borderline bodies.

Some denizens of the Night Land have been unleashed by ‘olden sciences... disturbing the unmeasurable Outward Powers’ (44). When the ‘Wise People’ of earlier eras made ‘dealings and had experiment with those Forces which are Distasteful and Harmful unto Life ... they did open a way for those Forces; and much harm and Pity did come thereby’ (130). As Chapter Three has discussed, these forces have gained access through gaps or weaknesses in the barrier between this and other dimensions, themselves adapting to suit their new environment: ‘fresh and greater monstrosities developed and bred out of all space and Outward Dimensions, attracted, even as it might be Infernal sharks, by that lonely and mighty hill of humanity’ (46). These ‘Infernal sharks’ are drawn to humans as a food source, ‘even as sharks do come after the ship

⁶⁷ A further allusion to *The Time Machine*: ‘many and diverse were the creatures which had some human semblance; and intelligence, mechanical and cunning; so that certain of these lesser Brutes had machinery and underground ways... [and] were incredibly inured to hardship, as they might be wolves set in comparison with tender children’ (46). The beating machines and ‘extensive system of subterranean ventilation’ of the Morlocks and the childlike Eloi are clearly recalled (40).

that hath bullocks within', yet it is souls, or spirit, rather than bodies, on which they feed (228). Discussing *The Night Land*, Andy Robertson concisely identifies these beings as 'pneumavores', or 'soul-eaters'; a term which covers both those which are immaterial, like the invisible doorways, and those which are corporeal, like the Watchers ('Sharks of the Ether' par. 13). In *The Night Land*, bodies merely die, but souls are destroyed; those who venture into the Night Land are 'risking not the life only, but the spirit of life' (38). 'Death,' X remarks, 'is but a little matter by the side of Destruction' (171).

Robertson emphasises that pneumavores, even if they have come from another dimension or cosmos, are natural creatures, not demonic or supernatural ('Sharks of the Ether' par. 14). The threats to humans in the Night Land are therefore multiple: bodily harm, degenerative contamination, and spiritual destruction. Against most of these threats the humans have developed some degree of protection, through social law, weaponry, spiritual preparation, and the walls of the Great Redoubt. The protection of the walls is augmented by an Electric Circle powered by the Earth-Current, which gives out a 'subtile vibration' and prevents abominable monsters from approaching the pyramid.

The severity of the dangers of the Night Land means that the rules about who, how, and when one might venture out of the pyramid are strictly controlled. The Great Redoubt is an 'absolutely closed society with rigid internal controls designed to protect the population from external contamination' (Hurley 'Modernist Abominations' 141). The rules governing the circumstances under which a young man may leave the pyramid are stringent. For a start, only males are allowed out, if they are 'accounted healthful and sane' and are not put off by 'a strict account of the mutilating and horrid deeds done to those who had so adventured' (*Night Land* 58). Once abroad, certain other considerations have to be observed, such as not to eat or drink anything from the

Night Land, and to bite a suicide capsule in the skin of the arm for a clean death to save one's soul, rather than submit to destruction by pneumavores.

It is clearly important for the Great Redoubt to take its discipline seriously: 'so stern was the framing of the Law, that there were yet the metal pegs upon the inner side of the Great Gate, where had been stretched the skin of one who disobeyed; and was flayed and his hide set there to be a warning' (*Night Land* 83). The five hundred youths who leave the pyramid in an attempt to rescue the people of the Lesser Redoubt would, if they returned, 'be flogged, as seemed proper' (85). However, the primary purpose of this is not as a deterrent, but so that 'the one in question be corrected to the best advantage for his own well-being ... each should owe to pay only as much as shall suffice for the teaching of his own body and spirit. ... And this is wisdom, and denoteth now that a sound Principle shall prevent Practice from becoming monstrous' (85). This discipline, then, is born of sound principles, a virtue of the parental laws of the state, unquestioned by X as he takes on a parental role of protection, chastisement, and indeed, flogging, in his relationship with the wayward Naani.

'The art of punishing', writes Michel Foucault,

in the regime of disciplinary power, is aimed neither at expiation, not even precisely at repression. ... It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals. It introduces, through this 'value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*.

('The Means of Correct Training' 195)

Foucault expresses the purpose of the punishment as defining value, which is attributed to a set of normalising qualities. The structure, rules and discipline of the Great Redoubt set up a norm of behaviour, thereby defining difference. Difference, as we saw in Chapter Five, is monstrous or abnormal, in Hodgson's word, abhuman. The 'external frontier of the abnormal' is here literally defined by the walls of the pyramid: inside is normal, human, proper, valuable; outside is monstrous, abhuman, chaotic, expendable. Normalisation is a defence against deviance: normal is the opposite of monstrous, which is degenerate. We are told, through X's little metal book, that the founder of the Lesser Redoubt had been a citizen of the Great Redoubt, but 'escaped because of a correction set upon him for his spirit of irresponsibility, which had made him to cause disturbance among the orderly ones in the lowest city of the Great Redoubt' (*Night Land* 62). The founder exhibits a deviant character that threatens the stability of his city, and he must be punished to reaffirm normality.

His escape, however, has important implications for X's own story, since Naani belongs to the Lesser Redoubt. The founder,

being a master-spirit, planned and builded the smaller Redoubt, being aided thereto by four millions, who also were weary of the harass of the monsters; but until then had been wandered because of the restlessness of their blood. (*Night Land* 62)

The Lesser Redoubt, therefore, is populated by the descendents of not just one, but millions whose characters did not suit the discipline and constraints of the Great Redoubt. With their 'restlessness' and 'irresponsibility', these wanderers conflict with the Great Redoubt's philosophy of acceptance and cooperation. Their leader is a 'master-spirit', a Hodgsonism implying a superior, if aberrant, character, and they are

hardy and resourceful enough to survive for some time in the Night Land before building their new home. Nevertheless they are unfit for the Great Redoubt itself. They are throwbacks to the dangerous era before the pyramid was built, when the rules protecting human purity were not so strict. Humans used to live in cities, but as the sun died, ‘there grew upon many of the Peoples of the Cities of the Valley, a strangeness and a wildness ... And there were wanderings, and consortings with strange outward beings’ (131). The founding millions of the Lesser Redoubt developed a similar urge to ‘wander’: a trait that risks putting the species in danger of miscegenation and therefore degeneration.

X perceives that Naani is ‘bred less hardy’ than he is and that ‘the men of the Lesser Redoubt did be soft-made and lacking of grimness’ (*Night Land* 327). He attributes this to the lack of a strong or constant source of the Earth-Current. On top of this, however, the people are bred of ancestors with degenerate tendencies. Naani, born during the years of the temporary revival of the Earth-Current, is one of the spiritually strongest of her people. Her bravery after the fall of the Lesser Redoubt sets her apart in X’s eyes from the other, panicked refugees who are ‘without spirit of courage’ and fill the night with their ‘cryings and terror’ (323, 321). Nevertheless, however, she also exhibits characteristics of irresponsibility and wildness that align her with the founding generations.

Naani seems unable to control her ‘naughty spirit’ and ‘wayward unwisdom’ (*Night Land* 418). X realises she needs ‘to be whipt unto properness’, and ‘shaken so stern that she come unto the reality that I did be her man and natural master’ (438, 447). Her rebellious spirit and X’s determination to eradicate it in favour of what he sees as her proper meekness cause several quarrels that end in Naani’s punishment and submission. The narrator knows, with her best interests at heart, of course, ‘that she did have to be brought back from this way of spirit, even though I have to hurt her pretty body, that I bring her again to her dear natural wiseness’ (461). In the early stages of the journey he

chastens her by threatening, scolding, shaking, and whipping her hands or shoulders; later he ties a strap around her waist to keep her from running away into danger, which she does as soon as his back is turned, by cutting the leash with a knife (465). X disciplines Naani in an extension of the ‘sound principles’ of the Great Redoubt which authorise him to ‘correct’ her for her own good: ‘my heart and my reason both to approve mine action; and the Maid... to have come again to her dear natural wisdom’ (468-9). Naani must be normalised, brought to her ‘natural’ good sense if she is to find a place in X’s community.

Naani, and Aschoff, the rash leader of the five hundred youths, are singled out by being given proper names, making them unusually recognisable individuals in a hive society of homogenous millions. Yet their individuality is accompanied by their weakness. Aschoff is one of those who succumbs to the ‘wicked and false messages by those evil things of the Night Land’ and breaks the laws of the Great Redoubt by leaving it without permission. Later, he is too weak to resist the call of the House of Silence, disregarding a ‘Power of Goodness’ which tries to prevent them, and leading his followers to destruction: ‘Aschoff ran in through the great doorway of silence, and they that followed. And they nevermore came out or were seen by any human’ (111). Both characters display an ill-advised initiative in their actions that marks them as deviant.

In *Degeneration*, Nordau argued that what ‘nearly all degenerates lack is the sense of morality and of right and wrong. For them there exists no law, no decency, no modesty’ (18). From X’s point of view, although he believes her to be ‘wholesome of spirit and wise and in knowledge and good force of her being’, Naani lacks the sense that ought to show her the right way to behave and control her wayward impulses (*Night Land* 499). His efforts at explanation are in vain: ‘I pled and reasoned with her to be a wise maid; but, indeed, she only to make a gleeful mock of all that I did say’ (461). To him, Naani is an irrational child who must be guided, protected, and punished: she is ‘wild as a

child' and 'unreasoning'; at one point 'her naughtiness had gone nigh... to a wayward madness' as, on a whim, she leads him on a chase through lethal geysers (460).⁶⁸

'Women', comment Lombroso and Ferrero in *The Female Offender*, 'are big children' and are prone to excitable passions and emotion (151). In Lombroso's work, Hurley observes, 'the woman, the child, the savage, and the animal become interchangeable' (*Gothic Body* 97). Some elements of nineteenth-century imperialist discourse equated childhood with savagery as a paternalist justification of colonial policy: Naani can also be seen as an undeveloped savage who must be civilised by X's guidance.

Naani, understandably, is unaware of the laws supporting the Great Redoubt's civilisation. The injunction that 'no female ever' should be allowed to roam in the Night Land is thus broken. We might suppose that this rule relates to the role of males as fighters and protectors, as in Hodgson's time, while the weaker women are more vulnerable. But the phrase, including in the 1912 edition, is given in italics (*Night Land* 58). It is tempting to speculate that this rule expresses an additional anxiety about miscegenation, an anxiety related to women's freedom to move beyond the community's control and their potential to bring back contaminated genes. Introducing Naani's degenerate blood into the Great Redoubt could place the community at risk. Ultimately she only enters the Great Redoubt once she is apparently dead after the attack by the powers of the House of Silence. She is resurrected by the cleansing 'life-force of the Earth Current' which 'set[s] her spirit free of the Silence' and restores her natural strength, before she can be accepted into the pure society of the Great Redoubt (581).

⁶⁸ Commentary on the forums of thenightland.co.uk has intriguingly suggested that Naani is suffering from post-traumatic stress, which causes her to risk her life so crazily in the geysers and test X's ability to look after her (Xsaviur 'Suicidal Behaviour').
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‘Natural energetic agencies’: Vril and the Earth-Current

The Earth-Current ties the strength of the pyramid walls and the purity of humanity together. To it humans owe their survival in an aggressive world to which they are not naturally fitted, in an evolutionary sense, since it has provided them with the power to maintain a strong refuge and ward off monsters and pneumavores. Deriving from an apparently electromagnetic source within the earth, it supplies power for the technology and weapons of the city. A substitute for the sun, it provides light and electrical fertilisation for the Great Redoubt’s farms in the Underground Fields. X explains that the builders of the Lesser Redoubt had

chosen that place, because there they had discovered a sign of the Earth-Current in a great valley which led to the shore; for without the Earth-Current no Refuge could have existence. [They] worked within a great shaft; and in ten years had made this to a distance of many miles, and therewith they tapt the Earth-Current. (62)

The Great Redoubt is similarly built over a ‘Crack’ from which it draws the ‘Earth-Current’, although the Great Redoubt’s source is much stronger. The people depend on the Earth-Current for survival: it reinforces the pyramid’s fortifications, powers its weapons, enables its food to grow, and endows its people with a spiritual strength.

Andy Sawyer describes the Earth-Current as ‘a relative of Bulwer-Lytton’s “Vril”’, the power of the Vril-ya civilisation in *The Coming Race* (6). ‘I should call it electricity,’ Bulwer-Lytton’s narrator tells us,

except that it comprehends in its manifold branches other forces of nature, to which, in our scientific nomenclature, differing names are assigned,

such as magnetism, galvanism, &c. These people consider that in vril they have arrived at the unity in natural energetic agencies, which has been conjectured by many philosophers above ground. (53)

Vril is a general, all-purpose power source which comprehends in its capabilities many of the experimental sciences of the nineteenth century: mesmerism, galvanism, magnetism, psychical research. It unifies all these varieties of 'natural energetic agencies':

through vril conductors, [the Vril-ya] can exercise influence over minds and bodies.... all the faculties of the mind could be quickened to a degree unknown in the waking state, by trance or vision, in which the thoughts of one brain could be transmitted to another, and knowledge be thus rapidly interchanged. (*Coming Race* 54-5)

Vril, essentially, fulfils the hopes of spiritualists and psychical researchers by providing a medium to explain mesmerism and telepathy, and furthermore aligns these processes to technology through the use of 'conductors'. *The Night Land* does not offer such a functional discussion about the Earth-Current, but we learn that the people of the Great Redoubt possess 'brain-elements' with which the psychically stronger, like X, can directly communicate. The multipurpose Earth-Current not only strengthens these ephemeral powers, but also enables the Monstruwacans to operate 'recording instruments' to 'take the messages which came continually through the eternal darkness' in a sort of spiritual telegraphy (*Night Land* 332). These 'record slips' are continually passed down to the millions of the pyramid so that all information is universally communicated in a paper analogue of the collective telepathy which everyone possesses (52).

The Earth-Current provides the millions with a psychic ‘unity of sympathy’, and is explicitly linked to the ability or otherwise to cast telepathic messages: ‘mayhap, their brain-elements were weakened, through many ages of starvation of the Earth-Current’, X muses about the people of the Lesser Redoubt (*Night Land* 64). The Earth-Current powers the instruments, so that Naani’s messages become ‘weak and far and faint’ as the Earth-Current starts to fail again (78). This technologising again connects psychic powers to science, associating them, as spiritualists and psychical researchers did, with natural laws and the promise of new scientific discoveries in the workings of energy. In Wallis’s ‘The Last Days of Earth’, complaints by two of the last humans that another couple have not ‘answered our Marconi and telepathic messages’ align telepathic with telegraphic communication (Wallis 263). A logical association is formed between what were two apparently similar new forms of telecommunication in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁹

However, Bulwer-Lytton and Hodgson draw on a long tradition of belief and research in magnetic forces dating back at least to Fr. Athanasius Kircher in the mid seventeenth century, forces which in the nineteenth century, like psychic forces, formed a subject for physical science.⁷⁰ Lanzerotti and Gregori chart a chronology of nineteenth-century studies and measurements of telluric currents, mostly as a phenomena occurring spontaneously in telegraph wires. The term ‘telluric’ current refers to any electric currents, natural or artificial, flowing through the ground or the oceans. ‘Earth current’, a ‘common former term’, tended to refer to those natural currents, ‘the electric currents that are presumed to flow in the Earth’s core’ (Lanzerotti and Gregori 232).⁷¹ An 1858 *Handbook of Natural Philosophy*, for example, lists

⁶⁹ Ledger and Luckhurst note that the *fin-de-siècle* was ‘an era of extraordinary technological advance’ including ‘duplex telegraphy, the gramophone, the telephone, wireless telegraphy, X-rays, [and] cinematography’ (xii).

⁷⁰ Kircher, *Magnes, sive de arte magnetica* (1641) (Goodwin 72-3).

⁷¹ *After London* also makes reference to the influence of magnetic currents: ‘It has, too, been said that the earth, from some attractive power exercised by the passage of an

several theories of magnetism, including one in which ‘the globe of the earth is considered to be traversed by electric currents parallel to the magnetic equator’ (Lardner 205); the Proceedings of the Royal Society of London contain several discussions of earth-currents and their effect on telegraph wires and needles.⁷²

The concept, therefore, of currents running through the earth, and their relationship to the earth’s geomagnetic fields, was well established by the 1890s. However, the possibilities of electricity were far from fully understood in the mid- to late nineteenth century. For many, the enigmatic workings of the telegraph seemed as obscure as those of the séance. Richard Noakes observes that

Victorians in the mid-nineteenth century often found it hard to distinguish between telegraphy and spiritualism. In the early 1850s, the British public grappled with mysterious spiritual communications at the same time as new telegraph companies told them it was possible to use electricity to contact friends on earth. (‘Telegraphy Is an Occult Art’ 422)

Stead’s telephonic analogy for telepathy, given in Chapter Three, exemplifies this overlap. The use of Vril and the Earth-Current to power telepathy as well as technology thus becomes legible through the conflation of the two methods of communication, both underpinned or believed to be underpinned by electricity and magnetism. The two are further conflated by the later appropriation of the language of magnetism by psychical researchers to describe telepathy, for which it is possible ‘to surmise some sort of

enormous dark body through space, became tilted or inclined to its orbit more than before, and that this, while it lasted, altered the flow of the magnetic currents, which, in an imperceptible manner, influence in the minds of man. Hitherto the stream of human life had directed itself to the westward, but when this reversal of magnetism occurred, a general desire arose to turn to the east’ (Jefferies 12).

⁷² See, e.g., Henry Mance, ‘Method of Measuring the Resistance of a Conductor or of a Battery, or of a Telegraph-Line Influenced by Unknown Earth-Currents, from a Single Deflection of a Galvanometer of Unknown Resistance’ *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* 19 (1870-1): 248-252.

analogy to the familiar phenomena of the transmission and reception of vibratory energy' such as tuning forks and magnets, as Barrett, Gurney, and Myers explained in 'Thought Reading' (1882) (900).

As well as communication, Vril and the Earth-Current keep the population healthy. Anton Mesmer's use of magnetism to explain the effects of his 'fluid' in the eighteenth century had already established magnetism as symptomatic of a force that influenced health and vitality: Vril 'can replenish or invigorate life, heal, and preserve' and the Earth-Current produces 'happiness and certain joy in the living' (*Coming Race* 65; *Night Land* 64). Both power sources circumvent the problem of darkness in these sunless underground civilisations. The Vril-ya rely on 'the latent powers stored in the all-permeating fluid which they denominate vril' to supply the place of sunlight: 'From it they extract the light which supplies their lamps, finding it steadier, softer, and healthier than the other inflammable materials they had formerly used' (*Coming Race* 65). The Earth-Current enables the Underground Fields to flourish and provide food for the Great Redoubt: 'All of the Underground Land was lit, where needed, by the Earth-Current, and that same life-stream fructified the soil, and gave life and blood to the plants and to the trees, and to every busy and natural thing' (*Night Land* 57). Not only are Vril and the Earth-Current a substitute for the sun, they are *better*: Vril provides better light, and the Earth-Current energises not only plants but soil and creatures too. The superiority of these forces highlight the superiority of the two civilisations in comparison to those around them.

The Great Redoubt is superior to both the degenerate tribes and the Lesser Redoubt, while Raymond Williams writes of *The Coming Race* that

What makes the Vril-ya, who live under our earth, civilized is their possession of Vril, that all-purpose energy source which lies beyond electricity and magnetism. Outlying underground peoples who do not

possess Vril are barbarians; indeed the technology is the civilisation, and the improvement of manners and of social relations is firmly based on it alone. (Williams 3)

Vril underpins both the existence of civilisation as the Vril-ya know it and the improvement of human behaviour, while Hodgson's Earth-Current similarly powers and protects the pyramid alongside strengthening the human spirit and, consequently, reinforcing social harmony. The reinforcement of the internal civilisation contributes to defining its boundaries and thus the deviation and difference of the world outside.

Both power sources are capable of being used as weapons. The Vril Staff 'is hollow, and has in the handle several stops, keys, or springs by which its force can be altered, modified, or directed—so that by one process it destroys, by another it heals—by one it can rend the rock, by another disperse the vapour' (*Coming Race* 136). The Diskos carried by X is 'a disk of grey metal, sharp and wonderful, that spun in the end of a rod of grey metal, and [was] someways charged by the Earth-Current' (*Night Land* 88-9). Both weapons channel the power that defines each civilisation. Vril has put an end to conflict because it 'brought the art of destruction to such perfection as to annul all superiority in numbers, discipline, or military skill ... The age of war was therefore gone' (*Coming Race* 65-6). The Great Redoubt can use the Earth-Current similarly for powerful weapons 'that might slay without sound or flash at a full score miles and more', but which are not used because they are 'reckless' and 'waste the Earth-Current' (*Night Land* 93-4). The versatility of these power sources, their ubiquity, omnipotence, and equalising effects, again serve to eliminate sources of difference, supporting social harmony indirectly as well as directly.

In *The Night Land*, the importance of the Earth-Current is further demonstrated through the story of the Lesser Redoubt, which reveals the long-term effects of being without it. In the Lesser Redoubt, for a million years the Earth-Current had 'dwindled

slowly through the centuries' and the population declined in number and strength (63). The Earth-Current is what defines successful human civilisation, and X remarks that these people 'did lack the strong life that doth breed where is the beat of the Earth-Current' (327-8). Its resurgence, however, means that 'young people ceased to be old over-soon' and 'their blood moved afresh in their bodies', as well as causing a dramatic increase in the birth rate (64). The Earth-Current adds a vital dimension to human life. A similar force links body and soul in Flammarion's *Lumen*: 'We find in the human being three principles, *different, and yet in complete union*: 1. The body; 2. The vital energy; 3. The soul' (5). The concept of 'vital energy' is developed in Bulwer-Lytton's and Hodgson's novels to become Vril and the Earth-Current.

The Earth-Current underpins humanity's spiritual and mental strength, which complements their genetic purity. When the Earth-Current fails, the people of the Lesser Redoubt start to degenerate in their reason and grow vulnerable to physical and mental attack. The physical protection of the walls is undermined as the weakened humans are induced to open the doors:

an Evil Force had made action upon the Peoples within the Lesser Redoubt; so that some being utter weak by reason of the failing of the Earth-Current, had opened the Great Door, and gone forth into the night. And immediately there had come into the Lesser Pyramid, great and horrid monsters, and had made a great and brutish chase. (288)

The fall of the Lesser Redoubt prophesises the fate of the Great Redoubt, providing a glimpse of the ultimate horrors awaiting humanity. Flammarion's 'vital energy' sustains life and when it is 'exhausted' the soul is set free (*Lumen* 8-10). The Earth-Current supplies the 'vital energy' of life to an entire civilisation, which awaits the time of its 'exhaustion'. For Hodgson, however, the fate awaiting souls in *The Night Land* is a

terrible spiritual destruction rather than the astral freedom experienced by Lumen, although elsewhere in the novel, as we will see, X also suggests the possibility of an optimistic alternative.

While it helps to define the boundaries of civilisation, the Earth-Current is also a borderland force breaking down the barriers between physical and spiritual power. It provides physical invigoration and reinforces the protection of the fortress, but it also revitalises psychic abilities and strengthens spirit. It maintains the ethical process by helping to ensure that the species is kept healthy and strong, while degenerate influences are kept at a distance. While the Earth-Current has enabled humans to survive and resist degeneration, its eventual expiration leaves them more vulnerable than ever to the hostilities of an environment to which they are not naturally adapted. Humans have chosen this limited continued existence over the extinction implied by retrogressive metamorphosis. Hodgson, however, as we will see, attempts to address the loss of faith characterising the spiritual malaise of the *fin de siècle*. Like occultism and spiritualism, Hodgson uses his borderland world to explore possibilities of spiritual promise and consolation beyond the constraints of traditional Christian philosophy.

‘The germ of a new sense’: psychic evolution

The development of psychic faculties forms another major strength of the human species in the era of *The Night Land*. Telepathy allows X and Naani to communicate, but it has also had an effect on the development of human society. We are told that the people ‘were all advanced more in spiritual sight and hearing than the normal Peoples of this Age’ (109). Development of psychic faculties was seen by some of the psychical researchers as the natural next step in human evolution. In *Human personality and its survival of bodily death* (1903), Myers declared, ‘Spiritual evolution:—that, then, is our destiny, in this and other worlds;—an evolution gradual with many gradations, and rising to no assignable close’ (281). The progressive potential of the evolutionary

process encouraged psychical researchers to hope for the enhancement of humanity's future through the development of the human mind (Oppenheim 268). In Flammarion's *Omega*, for example, two new senses are developed: the electrical sense, so that 'everyone possessed the power of attracting and repelling both living and inert matter', and the eighth sense, 'the psychic sense, by which communication at a distance was possible' (*Omega* 202). In Wallis's 'The Last Days of Earth', '[l]ong ages of mental evolution had weeded all the petty vices and unreasoning passions out of the mind of man' (Wallis 258). Psychic evolution is the natural progressive step for humankind, and, moreover, leads to moral improvement.

Luckhurst argues that degenerationist accounts of the *fin de siècle* fail 'to pick up the currents of psychical research circulating in Gothic texts, because telepathy and other forms of hyperactivity were markers of evolutionary *advance*, rather than symptoms of reversion' (*Invention* 184). For Myers, at least, and for authors like Flammarion, Bulwer-Lytton, and Hodgson, it is certainly the case that psychic abilities denoted evolutionary advance. Into some discussions of telepathy, however, creeps a note of uncertainty. Telepathy is described by Oliver Lodge in 'Thought Transference' (1894) as 'a spontaneous occurrence of that intercommunication between mind and mind (or brain and brain), which, for want of a better term, we at present style thought transference'. He speculated on its significance:

What now is the meaning of this unexpected sympathetic resonance, this syntonic reverberation between minds? Is it conceivably the germ of a new sense, as it were; something which the human race is, in the progress of evolution, destined to receive in fuller measure? Or is it the relic of a faculty possessed by our animal ancestry before speech was? (Lodge 235)

While on one hand telepathy is viewed as a progressive development, it is also seen as potentially atavistic: a return to animal ancestry. In *Omega*, ‘The development of man’s intellectual faculties, and the cultivation of psychical science, had wrought great changes in humanity. Latent faculties of the soul had been discovered, faculties which had remained dormant for perhaps a million years’ (203). For both Lodge and Flammarion, the revival of ‘dormant’ psychic faculties is a method of naturalising psychic forces within biological development, yet the implied revival of animal instincts suggests a return to a simpler state of being.

Psychical researcher William Barrett, Pamela Thurschwell describes, imagined ‘a telepathic utopia where social justice would follow inevitably from shared thoughts’ (Thurschwell 25); for Barrett, psychic abilities figure as a crucial strand of utopian unity. For Myers, similarly, telepathy was a progressive step, ‘sometimes put in the service of Barrett’s collective utopia, but ... also seen as a throwback to a previous evolutionary state’ (26). Telepathy as an atavistic sense was traced by Barrett and Freud to insect communities. In *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, Barrett observed that ‘the habits of ants and bees seem to indicate the possession of communication unknown to us’ (294), while Freud remarked that:

we do not know how the common purpose comes about in the great insect communities; possibly it is done by means of direct psychical transference of this kind. One is led to a suspicion that this is the original, archaic method of communication between individuals and that in the course of phylogenetic evolution it has been replaced by the better method of giving information with the help of signals which are picked up by the sense organs. (‘Dreams and Occultism’ 55)⁷³

⁷³ Barrett and Freud both quoted in Thurschwell 26-7.
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Freud suggests that psychical transference in groups is an ‘archaic’ form of communication from which individual creatures have evolved away in favour of ‘better’ methods. A return to such a state is atavistic, and Thurschwell observes that Le Bon adopted a similar line of reasoning for his theories of crowd behaviour. In *The Crowd*, Le Bon reasoned that under the law of ‘mental unity’, an individual would be affected by the ‘magnetic influence’ from the rest of the group (11). In a crowd, an individual ‘possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings’ (13). For Le Bon, however, mental unity emphasises instinct over rationality. Individuals are brought down to the level of primitive animal passions, instead of being raised above it as Hodgson’s humans are above the primitive monsters around the pyramid.

Yet the recovery of lost abilities also represents a move away from the unsatisfactory present to a future that promises both a progressive development and reclamation of traits that humans have lost to the damaging influences of modernity. ‘In a word,’ wrote Frank Podmore, ‘such faculties must be regarded not as vestigial, but as rudimentary; a promise for the future, not an idle inheritance from the past’ (359). In this context, Hodgson’s novel, which looks backwards in many other respects— to the primal world, to a medieval chivalry—can be understood as a future which moves beyond the borders of modernity by idealising aspects of a ‘better’ past.⁷⁴

Such community offered possibilities for social as well as mental improvement. Thurschwell notes that that for some thinkers, ‘sociality itself, in its most radical form, would be telepathic’, as thought were shared en masse between citizens (27). Mesmerists had long believed mesmerism could contribute on a wider, social level: ‘human relations, social interaction, the functioning of government ... could all be ordered aright under the beneficent influence of mesmerism’ (Oppenheim 226). Richard Noakes

⁷⁴ A common characteristic of both Gothic and science-fiction. See Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* 30-36.

contends that for Barrett, the ‘power of etherial [sic] radiations to produce solidarity in the physical universes made likely the power of telepathy to produce unity among human beings and showed that it was the immaterial domain that gave unity and intelligibility to the universe’ (‘W. F. Barrett, Sensitive Flames, and Spiritualism’ 454). The adoption of psychic practices, it seemed, could lead to a plethora of positive social as well as mental and biological benefits. Psychic evolution is concurrently progressive and regressive; like the Earth-Current, it is a quintessential borderland phenomenon, collapsing the usual boundaries between developmental advance and retreat. A telepathic community, at once atavistic, collectivist, and progressive, forms the basis for Hodgson’s human civilisation in *The Night Land*: a hive community in which the law of the mental unity of crowds is made permanent by the psychic bonds of its members.

The psychic abilities of the community of the Great Redoubt, further facilitated by technology, give them a shared empathy of feeling. As X begins his journey, he feels the mental thoughts of millions of people at a time, who ‘did shake the aether of the world about me, with their unity of sympathy’ (*Night Land* 141). This collective emotion echoes the ‘mental unity’ of Le Bon’s crowd, but under Hodgson’s pen such a union produces positive energy instead of the destructive and negative force of Le Bon’s mob. X is conscious that ‘the unity of love of the Millions did make a natural Force about me’, counteracting the force from the House of Silence attacking Naani (551). The Millions think and feel as one; those with ‘great clearness’ and those with ‘doubtful’ powers are equally bonded and amplified by their ‘unity of sympathy’, enhancing their mutual commitment to the common good. The fall of the Lesser Redoubt is ultimately due to the failure of human mental strength as they are induced to open the doors, while the unified mentality of the Great Redoubt, Hodgson suggests, works positively for survival.

However, the humans present a faceless and nameless community. Individuals, even the narrator, are not named. In the future world, the only characters given proper names

are Naani and Aschoff, one degenerate, the other deviant, one cleansed, the other destroyed. The benefits of mental enhancement and closer social bonds that psychic evolution brings are accompanied by the loss of individuality observed in insect communities and in Le Bon's crowd. The regressive transformation of the crowd is characterised by 'the disappearance of conscious personality and the turning of feelings and thoughts in a definite direction' (Le Bon 2-3). Whether Hodgson supports or critiques this tendency is hard to determine. His own stance is possibly solipsistic: X, the romantic bodybuilder, is a stand-in for Hodgson himself, and as Naani's personality is subjugated to X's masculinity, so the faceless community of the Great Redoubt serves to foreground X's individual heroism. Nevertheless, it is their psychic unity that bonds the community into its stable whole and allows X to be a part of that whole (he actively identifies it as his 'Home') while still standing apart (his telepathic 'Night Hearing' is an unusual and superior gift).

While Wells tries to achieve a balance between collectivism and individuality in *A Modern Utopia*, as McLean discusses, in the psychical utopia (as we might term *The Coming Race* and *The Night Land*) loss of individuality and loss of creativity are the price of harmony. Perusing the art gallery in the College of Sages, the narrator of *The Coming Race* notices that the faces of portraits

began to evince a marked change about a thousand years after the Vril revolution...as the beauty and the grandeur of the countenance itself became more fully developed, the art of the painter became more tame and monotonous. (146-7)

As the Vril-ya's civilisation settled into its present perfection, it seems that the edge of artistic creativity became blunted. Artistic individuality is incompatible with a flawless society:

Towards the end [the narrator] sounds the note that we shall hear so clearly later in [Aldous] Huxley's *Brave New World*: that something valuable and even decisive—initiative and creativity are the hovering words—has been lost in the displacement of human industry to Vril. This was a question that was to haunt the technological utopia. (Williams 4)

The loss here identified by Williams harks back to Wells's struggle with the conflict between individuality and collectivism, represented as the loss of artistry. Social stability, affluence, and 'the displacement of human industry to Vril' has resulted in a decline in creativity, and by the same token, in leadership and political philosophy.⁷⁵

The narrator observes that 'where a society attains to a moral standard' with 'no crimes and no sorrows... no salient virtues or follies... it has lost the chance of producing a Shakespeare, or a Molière' (*Coming Race* 293). The decline of artistic genius in individuals must eventually impact on the rest of society. The Vril-ya lack what the narrator sees as an essential component of humanity: the emotional responsiveness to produce and appreciate art.⁷⁶

In *The Night Land*, the Millions wait patiently for the end of the world. The libraries are full of old books, and the creation of statues is a rare honorific. The primary occupation of the people of the Great Redoubt is watching the Night Land and its denizens and buildings, while the primary task of the Monstruwacans is to study and

⁷⁵ The same may be said of the collectivist Selenites in Wells's *First Men in the Moon* (1901), whose society Wagar describes in *Traversing Time* as 'a perfect despotism, where no individual enjoys even the opportunity to dissent or choose its own destiny' but which is 'a rational, orderly, efficient, and peaceful society' and 'knows nothing of wars or tribal conflicts' (59-60.) Hive-like societies such as that of Wells's Selenites become a recurring science fictional trope.

⁷⁶ In *The Time Machine*, the Time Traveller attributes 'the exquisite beauty of the buildings' in the year 802701 to the creative production of 'energy in security', which 'takes to art and to eroticism, and then come languor and decay', until the remains of the artistic spirit 'fade in the end into a contented inactivity' (33). Here, the loss of artistic tendencies accompanies degeneration rather than the other way round.

analyse them. Even in this, however, the people show a lack of imagination. It is an ‘honour to the youth who should add to the knowledge of the Pyramid’ by exploration, but the literal, descriptive labels the people give to the landscape reveal that their knowledge of the land they have watched for millions of years is very limited (58). For example, an eastern area that gives forth a ‘strange, dreadful laughter’ is duly titled ‘The Country Whence Comes the Great Laughter’, since this is all they know about it (41). The Headland From Which Strange Things Peer and the Three Silver Fire Holes are likewise self-explanatory (see Appendix 4). Everything is identified by description; the childlike simplicity of this language also indicates a people lacking the ingenuity of metaphor and metonymy or the creative confidence to pioneer new nouns. This paucity extends to proper names. Beyond the first, medieval-esque chapter, names are scarce and limited to Naani and Aschoff, who, as discussed, are associated with undesirable tendencies. We never learn the narrator’s name; he is known as X because of the publication in late 1912 of Hodgson’s abridged version of *The Night Land*, ‘The Dream of X’.⁷⁷ The Master Monstruwacan is known only by his job title. The stability of the Great Redoubt’s civilisation is characterised by lack of creativity as well as lack of individuality.

Nevertheless, the right sort of individual achievement is celebrated. On X’s return, the unanimous feelings of the millions save him because the Great Redoubt uses its weapons, at the risk of draining the Earth-Current. He observes ‘a strange blue flash, that smote downward into the Land ... And lo! I knew that the Humans did begin to fight for me, that I bring Mine Own safe unto Home’ (*Night Land* 556). Despite their commitment to the common good, the millions ‘could nowise check their gladness and

⁷⁷ In ‘The Dream of X’ Hodgson poses as an editor compiling the ‘charred fragments’ of a manuscript found in an iron box after a house fire, through which ‘we get glimpses of a stupendous Dream of the Future of this World’ (Preface). In contrast to the six hundred page epic of *The Night Land*, ‘The Dream of X’ runs to a mere and disappointing forty-four pages, essentially limited to X’s opening description of the Night Land, his reunion with Naani, and the sections from her being attacked by the House of Silence to the end (‘The Dream of X’ 15-59).

great wonder and excitement' at seeing X returning with Naani, 'and so shall you perceive that Humanity did but have grown more human' (547-8). Hodgson wishes to celebrate the endurance of the individual spirit alongside the endurance of the species spirit, although ultimately individuality is subjugated to the Huxleian requirement of curbing the cosmic process for the benefit of the species.

Hodgson uses psychic evolution to unify his utopian civilisation. In his humans, psychic ability is a borderline trait characterising an ambiguous futuristic world. *The Night Land* can be seen as both futuristic science fiction and a backward-looking chivalric romance, while the development of the human species both advances towards mental perfection and regresses to atavistic simplicity. The need to eke out the Earth-Current supply has brought civilisation 'nigh to the simplicity of the early world', in its basic weaponry, for example (95); a simpler past is idealised and yet the Great Redoubt also uses advanced technology such as lifts and 'moving roadways'. Hodgson's civilisation exists in a temporal and imaginative borderland, adopting aspects of the past to produce a sustainable future for human existence.

'Uplifting and Furtherance': dualism, reincarnation, and consolation

In his future world Hodgson replaces religion with a secular cosmology to give the future of the species a purpose for continued existence, as well as to re-establish humanity's significance in the material universe. Two strands of this cosmology may be termed reincarnation and dualism. Both are Theosophical, and thus ultimately originate in earlier religions and philosophies, but are mediated through the Theosophical interpretation of Madame Blavatsky in books like *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). Since Blavatsky drew her ideas from many religions and developed, or invented, many herself, and since there is no documentary evidence to say that Hodgson read her work, it is hard to pinpoint which themes he might have drawn directly from

Theosophy and which from elsewhere. The text of *The Night Land* forms a borderland in which different philosophies and ideologies can overlap and mingle.

There are several points at which Theosophical ideas intersect with Hodgson's. Chapter Three has discussed Blavatsky's comments on the Central Sun, the focus of the Recluse's journey in *The House on the Borderland*. Another intersection comes in Hodgson's choice of a pyramid to house his last humans; perhaps because of the longevity of its shape, since the Egyptian Pyramid of Giza is the oldest building on earth. Or perhaps it is because of the symbolism of the pyramid's shape:

As an emblem applicable to the objective idea, the simple triangle became a solid. When repeated in stone on the four cardinal points, it assumed the shape of the Pyramid—the symbol of the phenomenal merging into the noumenal Universe of thought—at the apex of the four triangles. ...the Pythagorean triangle [is] ... the grandest conception imaginable, as it symbolises both the ideal and the visible universes. (Blavatsky *Secret Doctrine* Vol. 1 617)

Perhaps Hodgson chose a pyramid because its symbolic shape signals a link between the corporeal and psychical worlds; a state of spiritual harmony towards which he felt his humans were growing closer.

A further Theosophical element is reincarnation. Humans, like X and Naani, have eternal souls. X believes Naani's 'spirit to have been always mine through all the Everlasting; and mayhap this to be how all Peoples shall come to be in the length of time', although the pain of her death is not lessened by the thought that he might 'live in some strange future, and to find her soul in some other sweet child' (509, 573).

Blavatsky wrote that 'the inner self, the purer portions of the earthly personal soul united with the spiritual principles and constituting the essential individuality, is

ensured a perpetuation of life in new births ('Death and Immortality' 254). 'Purity' of one's soul will ensure new life: Naani's wholesome soul is distinguished from her degenerate behaviour. Furthermore, reincarnation is a continual process, and Naani remembers some of her other earlier lives, in addition to being Mirdath. Psychological researchers had dwelt on the requirement, or incidence, of a strong emotional connection between two people for telepathy, or thought transference, to take place. Naani is for X the 'Only One, with whom my spirit and essence hath mated in all ages through the everlasting' (*Night Land* 72). Their souls are eternally linked, dissolving the boundaries of millennia of lives by the power of their great love.

Peter Keating notes the overlap between psychological research and the early work of what would become psychoanalysis (124).⁷⁸ Freud himself speculated that the unconscious might explain telepathy ('Dreams and Occultism' 55). F. W. H. Myers, however, was the first to posit the concept of the subliminal self, similar to the unconscious, which he believed accounted for telepathic communication and the survival of the spirit after the death of the body. Myers was not without personal reasons for this quest:

In 1873, Myers fell profoundly in love with Annie Marshall, a married woman with five children. The feelings were mutual: they vowed deep attachment to each other—in entirely platonic terms. Then three years later, Annie Marshall committed suicide, stabbing herself in her throat with a pair of scissors and then drowning herself in Derwentwater near her home. Her death was a devastating tragedy for Myers, and it suffuses his life's work and beliefs. (Warner 240)

⁷⁸ In 'Subliminal Promptings: Psychoanalytic Theory and the Society for Psychical Research', James Keeley describes the early development of Freud's and Myers's theories of the subliminal self and the unconscious, including the motivation for Freud's publishing 'A note on the Unconscious in Psycho-analysis' in the SPR's *Proceedings* (1912), surprising since Freud generally tried to distance his work from that of the SPR.
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This experience motivated much of Myers' work as he strove to understand what he saw as human spiritual survival, linked to the strength of love or attachment during life.⁷⁹

To this *The Night Land* adds a Theosophical interpretation of eternal survival and successive reincarnations of the same human spirits. Naani has the memory of many earlier successive lives, in which she and the narrator were not reunited but in which she was 'untuned unto all other men' (*Night Land* 505); in Theosophical terms, her soul had been working out its fate until it is resolved in the lovers' final union. This is directly connected to the strength of the bond the two lovers have between them: 'our spirits did be knit, being each the complement of the other' (509). As Myers wrote in 1903, 'Instead of describing a "ghost" as a dead person permitted to communicate with the living, let us define it as *a manifestation of persistent personal energy*, or as an indication that some kind of force is being exercised after death which is in some way connected with a person previously known on earth' (*Human Personality* 4). Endurance and connection are the two features of the eternal soul. Between two such spirits, the traditional boundaries of life and death and even the barrier of time have all been breached by the strength of the emotional bond; for Hodgson, the bond of eternal love.

In his definition of a 'ghost', Myers interprets a human spirit as an almost mindless force of energy. He concludes that 'Like atoms, like suns, like galaxies, our spirits are systems of forces which vibrate continually to each other's attractive power' (*Human Personality* 282). The spirit exists as a hybrid mingling of forces: atomic, vibratory, magnetic. X is specifically drawn to Naani's location because their spirits are invisibly linked; he would 'turn Northwards very frequent, by a certain feeling; and seemed unable of speech, if I were turned otherwise by force... which truly I set to the attracting

⁷⁹ Myers left a secret message to be opened after his death once he had communicated its contents from beyond the grave. In 1904, Cambridge scholar Margaret Verrall transmitted such a message by automatic writing. However, it did not match the note in Myers' envelope, which alluded to the home of Annie Marshall (J. Beer 138-40).

of her spirit' (*Night Land* 77-8). This attraction transcends the borders of physical distance as well as time. Hodgson uses the language of psychical research to explain and validate a long-standing literary phenomenon, turning the emotional mystery of the eternal bond of love into science fiction.⁸⁰

Humans are also protected by mysterious holy powers. The Glowing Dome that has halted the progress of the Watcher of the South, for example, is given as evidence that

there were other forces than evil at work in the Night Lands... even as the Forces of Darkness were loose upon the End of Man; so were there other Forces out to do battle with the Terror; though in ways most strange and unthought of by the human mind. (43-4)

The actions of these powers suggest that humans are favoured as part of a higher struggle between good and evil. X and Naani are threatened by a tree-shaped Evil Thing, and 'a clear burning Circle' appears above them: 'there fought for our souls one of those sweet Powers of Goodness, that did strive ever to stand between the Forces of Evil and the spirit of man' (337).⁸¹ To X, the circle is holy: a 'holy defense' and a 'Shield of Great and Lovely Force' (337). *The Night Land* offers a dualistic Manichean theology of the conflict between good and evil. It is a theology, or cosmology, or philosophy, that is also inspired by Theosophy and based on occult ideas about the forces existing on other planes or dimensions. For the Manichean, writes Samuel S.

⁸⁰ In *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jane and Rochester seem to hear each other calling to one another the night before Jane returns to Thornfield. 'In spirit,' Rochester reflects, 'I believe we must have met. You no doubt were, at that hour, in unconscious sleep, Jane: perhaps your soul wandered from its cell to comfort mine' (Brontë 472).

⁸¹ Steve Behrends interprets this 'tree' as a waterspout inspired by Hodgson's experience of cyclones, as described in 'Through the Vortex of a Cyclone' (see Chapter Four): 'Hodgson aficionados will tell you that he encountered at least one of these spinning monstrosities during his maritime experience. ... But perhaps the real clincher... is that Hodgson's photograph of his waterspout, as it rises in a terrifying spinning column that joins sea and sky, really *does* look like a Tree' (Behrends 35-6).

Coale, the ‘only hope of rescue is in some “gnosis”, some wisdom buried deep within the cosmos that resides in the spirit and seeks deliverance’ (4). For Hodgson, despite the bleakness of its ultimate fate under the pressures of the cosmic process and the law of entropy, humanity may still seek the transcendence inherent in the human soul. X’s endeavour against evil for the sake of love brings the human race one step closer, perhaps, to deliverance.

‘Good’, however, is not necessarily winning the struggle: the singling out of X and Naani, rather than any of the other survivors, for protection after the fall of the Lesser Redoubt evokes for Sawyer

a pervasive sense of doubt and despair which is at odds with any message that ‘Good’ may be superior to ‘Evil’. Such labels are inapplicable in *The Night Land*, where Humanity is the victim of contending forces and the ‘sweet Powers of Goodness’ are unaffected by human notions of morality.

(7)

The fatal attack on Naani by the House of Silence thus provokes no intervention: ‘why there came not any Sweet Power of Goodness to help me in my strait, I never to know; but did call desperate on all Good things to aid me’ (*Night Land* 546). Nevertheless, through his secular understanding of good and evil based on natural forces that for some reason value humanity, X clings to the spiritual consolation that the cosmos seems to offer. ‘I do have a wondrous hope of beauteous things,’ X tells us, following his declaration of his belief in the Man-Spirit, ‘and of sweet and mighty Uplifting and Furtherance unto that Glad World which we have beheld the shores of, when that we had stood in holiness with the Beloved’ (522). X’s words echo the Recluse of *The House on the Borderland* whose soul meets the soul of his Love on the ‘shores of the Sea of Sleep’ (*House* 183). In X’s philosophy, the human race continues to believe in

the hope of transcendence and the promise of a better world. At the same time, they still struggle against the menacing forces of the Night Land, to avoid the static complacency that Wells contended in *A Modern Utopia* would lead to stagnation and degeneration.

Rosny's *The Death of the Earth* explores a similar tension between action and passivity. The majority of people live in passive despair: 'Centuries of misfortune ran in the veins of these men; all reserves of sorrow or hope had dried up long ago. They had neither emotions or imagination, but lived their life of resignation in the present minute' (60). Hope dries up like the water on which humanity's survival depends. Most of the last humans choose suicide instead of the struggle for survival. One voices her existential despair about these wasted efforts: 'It was madness to resist nature all those millenia [sic]. They wanted to continue in a world that was no longer theirs... and they accepted this wretched oasis existence. It was life at all costs, anything not to perish' (161). For the dying girl, life is pointless and the struggle for survival after the disappearance of water is futile, in an echo of the sense of futility generate for some by the *fin de siècle*.

Humanity undergoes an emotional or psychological entropy alongside that of the planet. Targ and his sister Arva, however, are 'different. Their energy and capacity for emotion were unique in this twilight world. In their revolt they were but two tiny wills against the entire evolutionary process of their planet. And yet, full of hope and love, they burned with the same immense desires that had kept mankind alive for a million years' (Rosny 131-2). For Targ, his wife Ere is 'living gold', representing 'the energy and vitality of lost ages. ... She had given him love in its purest and most eternal form. With her in his arms he had seen his race born anew' (178). The biological continuation of humanity, of course, depends on both a man and a woman surviving, but Ere represents more than an Eve-figure. It is the pure and eternal love she offers that inspires Targ to hope. Only after her death and those of their children does Targ give up.

Again, Flammarion's short story 'The Last Days of the Earth' ends with a final word on the perpetuity of love. The last humans on earth die on a snow-covered globe, but meanwhile 'the infinite universe continued to exist with its billions of suns and its billions of living or extinct planets. And in all the worlds peopled with the joys of life, love continued to bloom beneath the smiling glance of the Eternal' ('Last Days' 569). In Flammarion's vision (as later in Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*) our planet is simply one of many, and where life might fail on one, it might succeed on another.⁸² The unifying elements are love, and what Flammarion terms 'the Eternal'. This is a glance toward the possibility of a god or a higher being along the lines of Stapledon's *Star Maker*: a secular deity. In *Omega*, the consolation of heaven is more explicit:

those superior souls which have acquired immortality continued to live forever in the hierarchy of the invisible psychic universe... Mankind had passed by transmigration through the worlds to a new life with God, and freed from the burdens of matter, soared with an endless progress in eternal light. (286)

Eternal night is replaced by eternal light, and God is reinstated in a 'psychic universe' if not a divine one. Eva and Omegar's deaths are followed by a sight only visible to 'the eyes of the soul': 'two small flames shining side by side, united by a common attraction, and rising... into the heavens'. Like Hodgson, Flammarion offers the consolation of love and the eternal soul as a foil to extinction: there may be no religious divinity, but even a material universe can contain mysteries that offer this hope. X explains that love brings 'eternal fulfilment': 'all pain and grief and all that doth make the shaping of Life, doth be but a process by which we be eternally perfected from living unto living' until

⁸² *Star Maker* also owes a considerable debt to Flammarion's *Lumen* in its visionary scope of a disembodied journey through the time and worlds of the universe.

perfect fulfilment is reached (510). The hope of this perfection is the driving force for each age of existence.

These visions of a marginalised human race dying out on an entropic planet are thus contrasted with the individual joy that can still be brought about by enduring romantic love beyond the borders of life. The citizens of the Great Redoubt wait and watch passively for the end that will come with the exhaustion of the Earth-Current. X's journey, however, shows what can be achieved by active determination. For X, like Targ, eternal love replaces heaven or divine planning as a motivating purpose for existence, transcending the usual boundaries of bodies and time. 'To have Love is to have all,' X assures us in the last lines of *The Night Land*, in a cyclic return to the happy state of the novel's beginning without even a glance towards the dark world in which he builds his 'House of Joy' (583).

Conclusion

For Hodgson, sub-titling his epic novel 'A Love Tale', the reunion of lovers seems to be the primary object of the narrative. Brian Stableford sees the 'Sea of Sleep' dream-sequence in chapter fourteen of *The House on the Borderland*, in which the Recluse meets the soul of his Love in a timeless borderland, as 'the first of several attempts made by Hodgson to use his own dreams as source-material for his literary work' ('The Composition of *The House on the Borderland*' 32). This, for Stableford, explains its disjointed discontinuity with the rest of the novel, but it may also suggest an undocumented personal reason for Hodgson's emphasis on X and Naani's situation as eternal lovers. To explore this theme, Hodgson places his ideas in the context of contemporary thought about the future of the world and the possibilities of spirit and mind, developing his ideas more or less consistently with contemporary theories of theosophy and psychical research (although these are not necessarily in themselves consistent).

As its presence in the stories of Wallis and Flammarion shows, the creative exploration of psychic evolution is not unique to Hodgson, but he does put it in a fuller and grander context, not merely biological. It becomes an essential rather than an incidental of his future vision, and directly links both stories of individuals and humankind as a whole. Hodgson's extrapolation of contemporary thought about the future also means that he cannot and does not ignore biological and geological conditions. For both Flammarion and Hodgson, the time required for psychic evolution means that it must take place concurrently with planetary entropy, and must take into account the potential effects of physical evolution on the human body and its implications for human society and morality. As a result Hodgson's humans live a borderland existence among multiple promises and threats, on the edges of time, of possibilities, and of destruction, reflecting the ambivalent attitude to the future reflected in different aspects of *fin-de-siècle* discourse.

X's exposition of human evolution through his discussion of the 'Man-spirit' (522), essentially sets out humankind's gradual journey towards a better world as humanity's given destiny, following those *fin-de-siècle* thinkers who interpreted evolutionary theory in this way. There is an essential human spirit, no matter what stage of physical development humanity is at, that ensures its place in the ineffable plan of the cosmos. At the same time, this human spirit is fragile and must be protected against those things that will either destroy it or dilute and contaminate it; it will not bear hybridisation. The potential for degeneration inherent in the cosmic process is not ignored or insignificant or not a threat. It is present in the story so that it might be counteracted by the best qualities of humanity: bravery, endeavour, love. The existential pessimism of the inevitability of the end of human physical survival, present in Hodgson as it is in Wells, is qualified by a return to faith. This faith is based on a materialistic spiritualist (Theosophical) interpretation of the struggle between good and evil as conflicting natural forces. Thus 'beauteous things' and eternal love become the natural destiny of

human spirits understood as ‘persistent personal energy’ in the universe rather than as the angelic souls of Christian theology.

The Night Land can be interpreted through various *fin-de-siècle* discourses of physical and social evolution. An organised collective society and strict rules about interaction from the outside world protects human civilisation from danger. Hodgson’s use of contemporary scientific theories around telepathy and electricity to generate key elements of his story brings *The Night Land* into the emerging genre of science-fiction, but it also owes a debt to the longer traditions of utopian and apocalyptic fiction. These varied influences shape *The Night Land*’s portrayal of attitudes towards bodily integrity, social organisation, human evolution, and spiritual meaning. As the strong human body is contrasted to the degenerate chaotic bodies of the Night Land, so is the human spirit contrasted to the evil forces which have invaded the world on a spiritual level. In *The Night Land* Hodgson produces a vision of a civilisation which has adopted specific strategies by which they resist, for a time, the inexorable pressures of the cosmic process. Hodgson adopts a Huxleian attitude to the role of ethical evolution in the long term future of the species, and draws on aspects of the Wellsian scientific romance to portray a utopian society that deals with the physical challenges of living beyond the death of the sun. At the same time, Hodgson balances this with a sense of individual meaningfulness, replacing religious consolation with an alternative borderland of mingled philosophies, based on eternal souls and enduring love, that attempts to remain consistent with the materialist approaches of the scientific and spiritual thinkers of his time.

Conclusion

This thesis has endeavoured to show that the fiction of William Hope Hodgson holds a key place in the development of Gothic and fantastic literature of the *fin de siècle* and early 1900s period. Through the theme of borderlands *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, *The House on the Borderland*, *The Ghost Pirates*, and *The Night Land* respond to cultural anxieties of the *fin de siècle*, especially those expressed in the fantastic mode through Gothic representations of body, spirit, and human experience. Hodgson's fiction makes an important contribution to the *fin-de-siècle* literary fantastic, and explores some of the *fin-de-siècle* discourses which literary criticism has left relatively neglected: the significance of spiritualism and psychical research, and the cyclic nature of visions of regeneration of the world which degeneration discourse does not always take into account.

For Gothic writers, science of the *fin de siècle* opened up not only the possibility of mutable bodies and human degeneration in the modern world, but inspired a series of visions of the other world. This other world is not only inscribed with immaterial supernatural horrors, but contains material beings that intrude on our own world in monstrous form. Evolutionary theory fed not only the range of monstrous organic life in the known physical world but extended in the Gothic imagination to other dimensions. If other worlds contained different conditions of existence, for example with regard to the blurred line between spirit and matter, then evolutionary pressures, according to these different conditions, could produce monstrosities beyond the possibilities engendered by earthly species, beyond imagination, beyond representation, and into the realm of the inexpressible. This thesis has explored the ways in which these boundaries

can be violated, and the literal and symbolic ways in which Hodgson's texts and other Gothic fictions attempt to represent the incomprehensible.

In Hodgson's fiction, the known world brushes against borderlands of other places or forms. Geographical, mental, or immaterial portals facilitate access to borderlands. Hodgson exploits psychical research in the Gothic mode to open up exploration of the borderlands beyond the normal realms of human experience. The other side of the borderland is overwhelmingly terrible, destroying mind and soul through its meaningless incomprehensibility. For Hodgson, the sea formed a particular sort of liminal region enabling a particular sort of borderland crossover. While the sea forms a space in which humanity can be exposed to the metaphysical terrors of the natural universe, it is also a space in which the line between material and immaterial existence becomes doubtful. The uncharted mystery of the changing, shifting, and unmappable oceans means that they can harbour natural beings and unknown monsters as well as supernatural borderland entities.

The distinction between natural and supernatural horrors in Hodgson's fiction is imprecise and does not fall straightforwardly along the line between immaterial and corporeal monstrosity. Terrible immaterial forces are presented as the natural results of scientific meddling or psychical 'ruptures in the Aether', while organic monsters exude an innate and abhorrent evilness that belies a purely natural origin. While for Hodgson the forces of evolution produce an array of physical monstrosities, science also has the potential to unleash or access spiritual horrors: the definitions of science and evolution extend into occult and spiritualist realms, as well as into temporality.

The effects of time and entropy on the horrors of the world form another key theme for Hodgson in *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland*. These science fictional texts were able to take their stories into the future of the world and the universe. Dwelling on the heat-death of the sun and the pessimism about the future of the human race and civilisation to which this concept gave rise, *The Night Land* also

seeks a way out, through the possibility of cyclical regeneration that looks back to mythical conceptions of the universe as much as to new discoveries in, for example, radioactive science. *The Night Land* is not only a site for the author's exploration of his imaginative reactions to the implications of evolution and entropy for the future of the world, but also expresses some of the more ambivalent responses of the *fin de siècle* to the decline of national fitness and the threats posed by degenerative modernity.

The cultural concerns of the *fin de siècle* find particularly colourful expressions through the Gothic and other fantastic fiction of this period, exploring anxieties about identity, fitness, progress, and decline through problematic and fluctuating shapes, reflective borderlands, and representations of the future and the past. While many modern Gothic texts have been seen as a response to the pessimistic malaise of the *fin de siècle*, Hodgson's position as an author shaped by conditions on both sides of the borderline of 1900 leads him to produce more ambivalent narratives that work through conflicting viewpoints. After H. G. Wells, Gothic fiction began to look forward as well as backwards, combining Gothic with utopian futurity. While Gothic imaginings of the past are also coloured by the values and perspectives of the intervening years, representations of the future can only be shaped by the present and by extrapolations from the present. It is no coincidence that this shift starts to take place at the *fin de siècle*, enabled by rapidly changing modern technology, the encouragement to look forward generated by the prospective dawn of the twentieth century, and the reading and publishing conditions of the 1880s and 90s. At the point where Gothic borders on science fiction, therefore, where utopianism meets its pessimistic double, the line between doubt and optimism about the future becomes blurred, enabling texts like *The Night Land* in which degeneration and progression take place simultaneously.

Hodgson's four novels can be seen as a series of such responses. *The Ghost Pirates* devotes itself to the imaginative possibilities for horror inherent in the spiritualist and occult conception of overlapping realms of existence. *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*

exploits the monstrous vitality of the evolutionary urge that produces strange creatures fit for strange environments. *The House on the Borderland* incorporates structural and thematic elements from the Gothic tradition with a science fictional visionary future, oscillating between monstrous terrors and metaphysical speculation. These three novels make way for *The Night Land*, which combines all these themes into a future world of borderlands, monsters, and spiritual destiny, destabilising the line between Gothic and science fiction,

This thesis contributes to an understanding of Gothic literature of the *fin de siècle* period by exploring how sometimes heterogeneous themes are brought together in Hodgson's borderland fictions, indicating connections between apparently disparate disciplines and discourses. These connections suggest that it is not simply cultural anxieties that emerge in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic but that ambivalence also plays a part: some texts seem to support hegemonic perspectives on, for example, human identity through a normalised gender and race, while other texts express doubt or uncertainty about *fin-de-siècle* ideological directions. Hodgson's fiction wavers between subversive and hegemonic values in its exploration of the nature of the human body and soul through the physical effects of evolution and the possibilities offered by spiritualism. On a metaphysical level, it oscillates between presenting the natural universe as something terrible and anti-human, as something wonderful in which lonely souls are reunited, and something horrifying and incomprehensible, indifferent and meaningless. The simultaneity of these meanings in Hodgson's texts suggests a greater doubt or uncertainty about the reducibility of the world to a common level of understanding: only by being understood as a borderland can this multiplicity of meanings of the natural world and cosmos become acceptable, expressible, and anywhere near comprehensible.

Hodgson was a product of the *fin de siècle*, shaped by the late Victorian period in his younger years, yet writing fiction in the early years of the twentieth century.

However, the impact of his work was not limited to the period in which it was

published, nor to his short lifetime. Hodgson's imagination still speaks to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in which Gothic and horror remain culturally, and thus increasingly academically, significant. Questions remain about the fate of Hodgson's work over the past hundred years, and how some of his ideas have endured and succeeded in reviving in this later period. Tracing his impact on twentieth and twenty-first century horror would contribute to a greater understanding of how the *fin de siècle* has shaped our cultural anxieties and our expressions of threats and fears. The subjects of Hodgson's fiction exemplify some of the most significant preoccupations of the time, and the *fin de siècle* in turn has helped to shape our modern culture. Concerns about the implications of scientific discoveries, the prospect of the changing conditions of the planet, or genetics and the mutability of the human form, for example, still form topics for debate in the twenty-first century. An understanding of how *fin-de-siècle* writers explored or expressed ideas derived from these discourses can help us to understand their wider implications for British culture, for example through attitudes towards social, political, and scientific changes and developments.

The research of this thesis has contributed to this process by exploring how some of the important issues of the *fin de siècle* are worked out through Gothic horror and science fiction texts. The imaginative range of these modes of writing allows some of the contradictory and divergent responses to cultural concerns to be expressed. *The Night Land*, for example, enables the fears associated with the heat-death of the sun to be simultaneously explored alongside the possibility for universal regeneration, while the psychical borderlands of Machen's *The Great God Pan* or Hodgson's 'The Baumoff Explosive' allow the concerns about the dangers of scientific experimentation to be expressed alongside the hope for the revelation of universal truths. Hodgson's emphasis on borderlands in his fiction reflects the characteristic ambivalence and doubt of the transitional period of the *fin de siècle*. In fantastic fiction, borderlands explore possibilities rather than certainties, and do not require an unequivocal choice to be

made. Hodgson uses borderlands to explore his sense of the possibility, horror, and optimism generated by the *fin de siècle*, expressed through his visions of monstrosity, other worlds, and future times, and compounded by his own imaginative interests in the borderlands of the body, the psyche, and the sea.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Hodgson's early short story publications in the popular press

This list goes up to about 1930; there have been many reprints in magazines, anthologies and collections since then, e.g. *Weird Tales* in the 1970s, which I have not attempted to catalogue. Bold type indicates the first publication of the story; normal type and the letter **b** or **c** indicates early reprints, sometimes with a different title. This data has been collected primarily from Moskowitz's three essays in *Out of the Storm, Terrors of the Sea, and The Haunted Pampero*, from Joseph Bell, *An Annotated Bibliography*, from Doug Anderson *et al.*, 'William Hope Hodgson: a bibliography', and from William G. Contento's FictionMags Index.

Published in Britain					Published in North America				
	<i>Short Story Title</i>	<i>Magazine</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Month</i>		<i>Short Story Title</i>	<i>Magazine</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Month</i>
1	The Goddess of Death	<i>The Royal Magazine</i>	1904	Apr					
2	A Tropical Horror	<i>The Grand Magazine</i>	1905	Jun					
3	The Valley of Lost Children	<i>The Cornhill Magazine</i>	1906	Feb					
4.b	From the Tideless Sea	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1907	May	4.a	From the Tideless Sea	<i>The Monthly Story Magazine, became Blue Book Magazine</i>	1906	Apr
5.b	The Fifth Message from the Tideless Sea	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1911	May	5.a	More News from the Homebird	<i>Blue Book Magazine</i>	1907	Aug
6.a	The Mystery of The Derelict	<i>The Storyteller</i>	1907	Jul	6.b	The Terrible Derelict	<i>Blue Book Magazine</i>	1918	Sept
6.c	The Mystery of the Derelict	<i>The Argosy</i>	1929		7	The Terror of the Water Tank	<i>Blue Book Magazine</i>	1907	Sept

Published in Britain					Published in North America				
8	Through the Vortex of a Cyclone	<i>Putnam's Monthly</i>	1907	Nov					
9.b	The Voice in the Night	<i>Nash's Magazine</i>	1910	Jan	9.a	The Voice in the Night	<i>Blue Book Magazine</i>	1907	Nov
10.a	The Shamraken Homeward Bounder	<i>Putnam's Monthly</i>	1908	Apr					
10.b	Homeward Bound	<i>Windsor Magazine</i>	1912	Nov					
10.c	Homeward Bound	<i>The Argosy</i>	1938	Apr					
11	Date 1965: Modern Warfare	<i>The New Age Magazine</i>	1908	Dec					
12	Out of the Storm	<i>Putnam's Monthly</i>	1909	Feb					
13	The Gateway of the Monster (Carnacki)	<i>The Idler</i>	1910	Jan					
14	The House among the Laurels (Carnacki)	<i>The Idler</i>	1910	Feb					
15.a	The Whistling Room (Carnacki)	<i>The Idler</i>	1910	Mar					
15.b	The Whistling Room (Carnacki)	<i>The Argosy</i>	1927						
16	The Horse of the Invisible (Carnacki)	<i>The Idler</i>	1910	Apr					
17	The Searcher of the End House (Carnacki)	<i>The Idler</i>	1910	Jun					
18	The Captain of the Onion Boat (novelette)	<i>Nash's Magazine</i>	1910	Dec					
19	The Smugglers	<i>Premier Magazine</i>	1911	Mar					
20.a	The Mystery of the Water-Logged Ship	<i>The Grand Magazine</i>	1911	May	20.b	The Mystery of the Water-Logged Ship	<i>Short Stories</i>	1911	Oct
21.a	My House Shall be Called the House of Prayer	<i>The Cornhill Magazine</i>	1911	May	21.b	My House Shall be Called the House of Prayer	<i>Today's Magazine</i>	1911	June

Published in Britain				Published in North America			
21.c	My House Shall be Called the House of Prayer	<i>The Argosy</i>	1929				
22.b	The Albatross	<i>New Magazine</i>	1912	Oct	22.a The Albatross	<i>Adventure</i>	1911 July
23	In the Wailing Gully	<i>The Grand Magazine</i>	1911	Sept			
24.a	The Ghosts of the ‘Glen Doon’	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1911	Dec	24.b The ‘Glen Doon’	<i>Sea Stories</i>	1923
25	The Thing Invisible (Carnacki)	<i>New Magazine</i>	1912	Jan			
26.a	The Prentices’ Mutiny	<i>The Wide World Magazine</i>	1912	Feb-Apr	26.b The ‘Prentices’ Mutiny	<i>Sea Stories</i>	1923 Oct
27.a	The Real Thing: On the Bridge	<i>The Westminster Gazette</i>	1912	Apr	27.b The Real Thing: On the Bridge	<i>All-Around Magazine</i>	1916 Sep
28	Mr. Jock Damplank	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1912	Apr			
29.a	Captain Jat—The Island of the Ud	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1912	May	29.b Captain Jat—The Island of the Ud	<i>Short Stories</i>	1912 Oct
30.a	Judge Barclay’s Wife	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1912	July	30.b Judge Barclay’s Wife	<i>Adventure</i>	1912 Oct
30.c	Judge Barclay’s Wife	<i>The Argosy</i>	1932	May			
31	The Getting Even of Tommy Dodd	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1912	Aug			
32	Captain Jat—Adventure of the Headland	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1912	Nov			
33.a	The Derelict	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1912	Dec	33.b The Derelict	<i>All-Around Magazine</i>	1916 Feb
34.a	The Thing in the Weeds	<i>The Storyteller</i>	1913	Jan	34.b An Adventure of the Deep Waters	<i>Short Stories</i>	1916 Feb
35	The Girl with the Grey Eyes	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1913	Jan			
36	The Finding of the Graiken	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1913	Feb			

Published in Britain					Published in North America				
37.a	Sea Horses	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1913	Mar		<i>Designer</i>		1920	
38	How the Honourable Billy Darrell Raided the Wind	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1913	Mar					
39	Kind, Kind and Gentle is She	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1913	Apr					
40.a	Second Mate of the Buster	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1913	May	40.b	Jack Grey, Second Mate	<i>Adventure</i>	1917	Jul
41.b	The Island of the Crossbones	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1914	Jan	41.a	The Island of the Crossbones	<i>Short Stories</i>	1913	Oct
42.a	The Bells of the Laughing Sally	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1914	Apr	42.b	The Bells of the <i>Laughing Sally</i>	<i>Short Stories</i>	1914	Sept
43	Contraband of War (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1914	July					
44.a	The Stone Ship	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1914	July	44.b	The Silent Ship	<i>Short Stories</i>	1918	Dec
45	The Diamond Spy (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1914	Aug					
46	The Trimming of Captain Dunkan	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1914	Aug					
47	The Red Herring (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1914	Sept					
48	The Case of the Chinese Curio Dealer (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1914	Oct					
49	The Drum of Saccharine (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1914	Nov					
50.a	The Getting Even of 'Parson' Guyles	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1914	Nov	50.b	The Getting Even of 'Parson' Guyles	<i>Popular Magazine</i>	1916	Feb
51	From Information Received (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1914	Dec					
52	He 'Assists' the Enemy (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1915	Jan					

Published in Britain					Published in North America				
53.a	The Adventure with the Claim Jumpers	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1915	Jan	53.b	The Adventure with the Claim Jumpers	<i>Short Stories</i>	1915	Nov
54.a	The Regeneration of Bully Keller	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1915	Mar	54.b	The Waterloo of a Hard-Case Skipper	<i>Everybody's Magazine</i>	1919	Jul
55	The Problem of the Pearls (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1915	May					
55.a	The Haunting of the Lady Shannon	<i>The Premier Magazine</i>	1915	July	55.b	The Haunting of the Lady Shannon	<i>Adventure</i>	1919	Mar
56	The Friendship of Monsieur Jeynois	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1915	Aug					
57	The Inn of the Black Crow	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1915	Oct					
58	The Painted Lady (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1915	Nov					
59	The Mystery of Missing Ships	<i>All-Around Magazine</i>	1915	Dec					
60	What Happened in the Thunderbolt	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1916	Jan					
61	How Sir Jerrold Tryn Dealt with the Dutch in Caunston Cove	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1916	May					
62	The Adventure of the Garter (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1916	Sept					
63	Jem Binney and the Safe at Lockwood Hall	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1916	Oct					
64	My Lady's Jewels (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1916	Dec					
65.a	The Real Thing: S.O.S.	<i>The Cornhill Magazine</i>	1917	Jan	65.b	The Real Thing: S.O.S.	<i>Adventure</i>	1918?	
66	Cobbler Juk	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1917	Apr					

Published in Britain					Published in North America				
67	The Mystery of Captain Chappel	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1917	Apr					
68	Trading with the Enemy (Captain Gault)	<i>The London Magazine</i>	1917	Oct					
70	Diamond Cut Diamond with a Vengeance	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1918	Jan	69	A Fight with a Submarine	<i>Canada in Khaki</i>	1918	Jan
71.b	The Haunted 'Pampero'	<i>The Premier Magazine</i>	1919	Mar	71.a	The Haunted Pampero	<i>Short Stories</i>	1918	Feb
72.a	The Home-Coming of Captain Dan	<i>The Red Magazine</i>	1918	May	72.b	The Buccaneer Comes back	<i>People's Favourite Magazine</i>	1918	Nov
74	The Thing Invisible (Carnacki)	<i>Nash's Magazine</i>	1919	Jun	73	In the Danger Zone	<i>Canada in Khaki</i>	1919	June
75	The Baumoff Explosive	<i>Nash's Illustrated Weekly</i>	1919	Sept					
76					76	Old Golly	<i>Short Stories</i>	1919	Dec
78	Ships that go Missing	<i>The Premier Magazine</i>	1920	Feb	77	The Storm	<i>Short Stories</i>	1919	Dec
79	Cyclonic Storm—The Dread Tiger of the Oceans	<i>The Strand Magazine</i>	1920	Mar					
80	The Voice in the Dawn	<i>The Premier Magazine</i>	1920	Nov					
81	A Timely Escape	<i>The Blue Magazine</i>	1922	Jun					
					82	Demons of the Sea	<i>Sea Stories</i>	1923	
					83	Merciful Plunder	<i>Argosy All-Story Weekly</i>	1925	July
					84	The Wild Man of the Sea	<i>Sea Stories</i>	1926	May
85	The Haunted 'Jarvee' (Carnacki)	<i>The Premier Magazine</i>	1929	Mar					

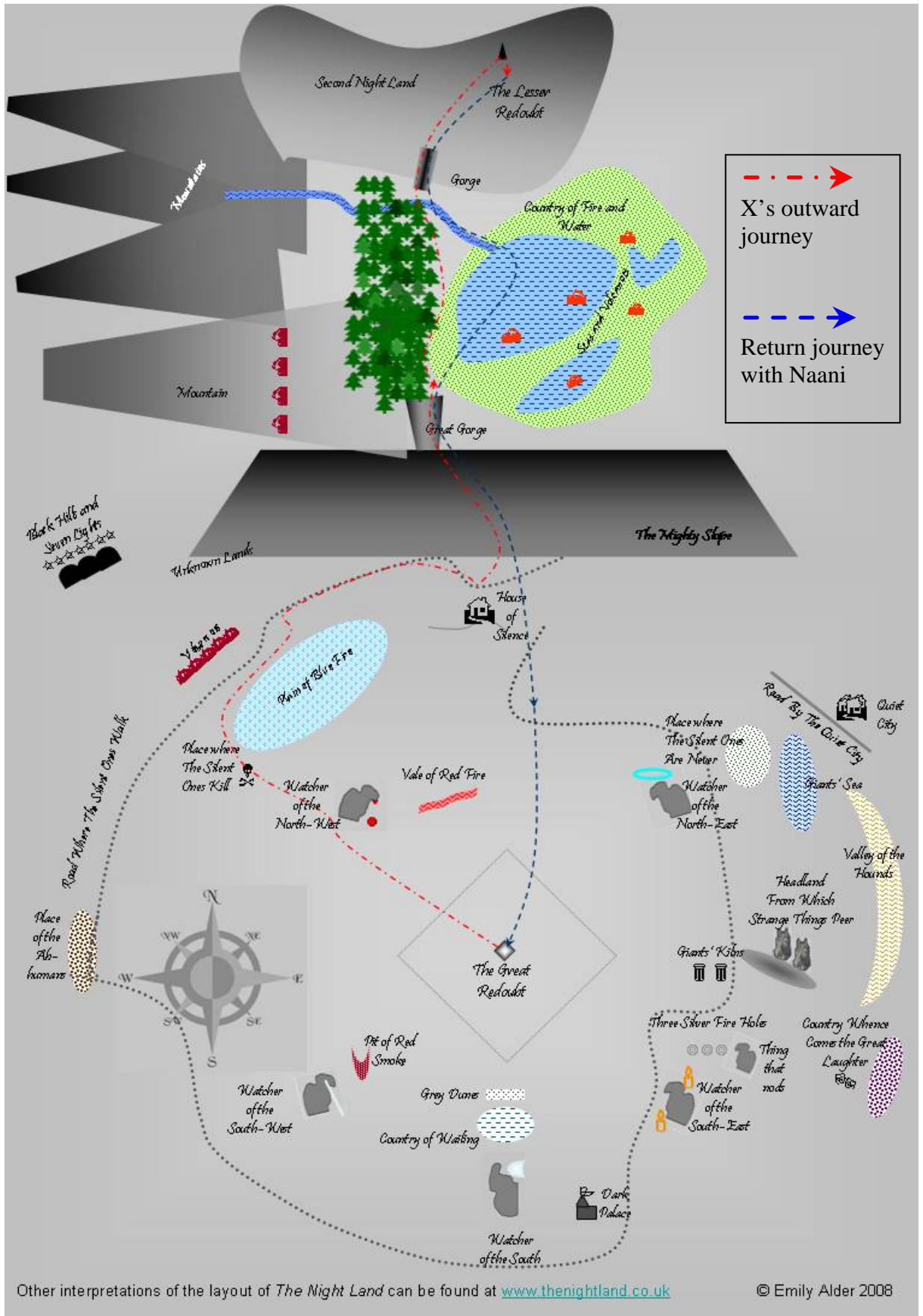
Appendix 2: Selected list of major book editions

Title	Publisher	Year	Notes
<i>The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'</i>	London: Chapman & Hall	1907	
<i>The House on the Borderland</i>		1908	
<i>The Ghost Pirates</i>	London: Stanley Paul	1909	
<i>The Night Land: A Love Tale</i>	London: Eveleigh Nash	1912	
<i>Poems and 'The Dream of X'</i>	London: A P Watt	1912	
<i>Carnacki the Ghost-Finder</i>	London: Eveleigh Nash	1913	The six 'Carnacki' stories from the <i>Idler</i> in 1910
<i>Men of the Deep Waters</i>		1914	Short stories
<i>The Luck of the Strong</i>		1916	Short stories
Reprints of all novels	London: Holden & Hardingham	1920-1	<i>Night Land</i> abridged: chs. VI, VIII, and XII deleted.
<i>The House on the Borderland and Other Novels</i>	Sauk City: Arkham House	1946	<i>Boats, House, Pirates, and The Night Land</i>
<i>Carnacki the Ghost-Finder</i>		1947	The six originals plus 'The Haunted Jarvee', 'The Find', and 'The Hog'
<i>Boats</i>	New York: Ballantine Books	1971	
<i>Night Land</i>		1973	2 vols.; introduction by Lin Carter
Reprints of all novels	London: Sphere Books	1979-82	
<i>The House on the Borderland and Other Novels</i>	London: Gollancz,	2002	Fantasy Masterworks series reprint of Arkham House edition.
<i>William Hope Hodgson's The House on the Borderland</i>	New York: DC Comics	2003	Graphic novel by Simon Revelstroke, Richard Corben
<i>The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig' and Other Nautical Adventures</i>		2003	<i>Collected Fiction of William Hope Hodgson</i> , edited by Jeremy Lassen
<i>The House on the Borderland and Other Mysterious Places</i>		2004	
<i>The Ghost Pirates and Other Revenants of the Sea</i>		2005	
<i>The Night Land and Other Perilous Romances</i>		2005	
<i>The Dream of X and Other Fantastic Visions</i>		2006	
<i>Men of the Deep Waters</i>	Aegypan Press	2006	Reprint of Nash edition

Appendix 3: Chronology of Hodgson's life

1877	Born in Essex
1886	Favourite sister Lissie born
1887	Family moves to County Galway in Eire
1890	Family moves to Blackburn in Lancashire
1891	Runs away to sea
1892	Father Samuel dies
1895	Completes apprenticeship and joins Merchant Marine
1898	Awarded Humane Society's bronze medal for rescuing shipmate
1899	Opens School of Physical Culture in Blackburn
1900	Grandfather William Hodgson dies leaving fortune to Hope's mother
1902	Challenges escape-artist Houdini
1902	School fails for lack of business
1903	Publishes first articles on physical culture in <i>Sandow's Magazine</i> and <i>Cassell's Magazine</i>
1904	Family moves to Borth in Wales
1904	First short story, 'The Goddess of Death', published in <i>Royal Magazine</i>
1905-8	Remaining siblings emigrate to Canada, except Lissie
1907	<i>The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'</i> published
1908	<i>The House on the Borderland</i> published
1909	<i>The Ghost Pirates</i> published
1912	<i>The Night Land</i> published
1913	Marries Bessie Farnworth (Betty) and moves to France
1914	WW1 begins; returns to England with Betty
1915	Joins 171 st Battery of the Royal Field Artillery commissioned as Lieutenant
1916	Thrown from horse and returns injured to Borth for a few months
1917	Recommissioned to the Royal Field Artillery, 11 th Brigade
1918	Killed in Belgium by German artillery fire. Hodgson's death was officially recorded as 17 April, but evidence from the C.O.'s log indicates it was actually 19 April (Everts 22).
1933	Mother Lizzie dies
1943	Betty dies
1959	Sister Lissie dies

Appendix 4: Suggested map of the Night Land



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