

The Creepy Images of Modern Life

Norman Simms
Waikato University

“Is there a form of hysterics that bursts into words instead of tears?”¹

Before there were words, there were images; and before there were images, there were sensations; and before there were sensations there was pain and fear and trauma—and a vast empty gap where consciousness would be, as one of Wilkie Collins’s characters put it:

...a horror of blank stillness is all about us—and as the shadow creeps onward, until we are enveloped in it from front to rear, we shiver with icy cold under the fiery air and amid the lurid lava pillars which hem us in on either side.²

But it is not only shadows that creep onwards, under doors and into covered spaces. In *The Cloister and the Hearth* we find, on the same page, “Then a light crept under the door and nothing more” and less than a dozen lines later “The man glided into the apartment.”³ soon Yet in these texts what seems disgusting and threatening on the outside, is experienced within, under the skin, both as an invasion of what threatens in the external world and what, more insidiously, is embodied under one’s own flesh:

Don’t tell me that about him any more; my flesh creeps at it!⁴

On the other hand, there is another more positive interpretation given to the sensation of something foreign fluttering slowly under the skin, as when a female character comes out of a swoon: “the colour [began] creeping back to her face and lips...”⁵

¹ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 212. This novel first appeared in 1868. I am using the version republished along with two stories, “The Haunted Hotel” and “My Lady’s Money” in the Great Classic Library by Chancellor Press (London, 1994) pp. 1-421.

² Wilkie Collins, *Basil: A Story of Modern Life*, in three volumes (London: Richard Bentley, 1852) Part III, i, p. 113. The Project Gutenberg version does not have accurate page numbers, so my references are also to Part (Volume) and chapter numbers.

³ Charles Reade Charles Reade, *The Cloister and the Heart*, the first edition had the elaborate subtitle *Or, Maid, Wife and Widow. A Matter-of-Fact Romance* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861), Chapter XXXIII, p. 118. This was soon simplified to *A Tale of the Middle Ages*. Reade’s dates are 1814-1844.

⁴ Collins, *Basil*, Part III, vii, p. 186.

⁵ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 171.

Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 32, Number 1, 2018

ISSN- 0111-8854

@2018 Mentalities/Mentalités

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

Yet as Arno Gruen, a modern psychoanalyst reminds us, “Without becoming conscious of one’s psychic pain, a person cannot become a real human being but can at best resemble an efficient machine that imitates a human being.”⁶ Such would-be human beings (glow worms, vampires, monsters of the night) speak out in nineteenth-century fiction, often approaching the insights that became possible after the work of Freud and other psychoanalysts at the end of that century. When the fictional narrators speak out in novels and travel books (which Freud often mentioned as forms of modern fiction, with the main characters cut off from normal communities of colleagues, friends and relatives, and being isolated by their own spirit of curiosity and adventure which seem like dreams of phantom worlds arising from the depths of the unconsciousness, they are ambiguous voices and forms—as though they were seen and heard in a phantasmagoria.

Creepy Crawlies, Night Gliders and the Ascent from the Unconscious of all that has been Repressed

The young grass and vegetation were shooting into new life; concurrently all the creepy, crawly insect life of the jungle and estate was young and vigorous and hungry too....I prepared myself as best I could for a really gruesome horror.⁷

...but speech relieved the growing sense of ticklish horror that was creeping over me.⁸

The ghastly horror that shines through the dim half-world of dreams and Gothic fiction also appears in the artificial imagery projected by the magic lantern show at the heart of the phantasmagoria, as it will later in the jumpy pictures that arrive in the early horror films of the *fin-de-siècle*. Though in itself this mode of animal movement—creeping, crawling, gliding, slithering—may seem descriptive and natural, as synonym or at least analogue to humans feeling strange creatures and memories sneaking out of the immemorial past into the crisis of unwanted stimulation and inappropriate titillation, creepiness makes most sense as a psychological and moral term—a way of talking about something that came into being in the

⁶ Arno Gruen, “Surrendering Identity: Hermann Göring and Rudolf Hess” *Mind and Human Interaction* 12:1 (2001) 50.

⁷ Oscar Cook, “Boomerang” in Herbert van Thal, ed., *The Second Pan Book of Horror Stories* (London: Pan Books, 1960) p. 238. While a boomerang is an Australian Aborigine hunting tool, it is not used to knock down prey; rather, it is thrown into the air in the midst of a flock of birds, so that when the wooden throwing-stick returns to earth, some of the birds will follow it and thus become vulnerable to capture. In other words, it is a lure, a deceptive weapon. As with the term *creep* that marks the source of the uncanny sensation of the familiar becoming strange—the friendly gesture that becomes threatening and inappropriate in a sexual sense—the boomerang suggests something that ambiguously oversteps the mark, invades private (and safe) space.

⁸ Cook, “Boomerang” p. 239. A fuller discussion of this fictional tale will be given later in this essay.

documents, philosophical and literary, in which it was used. Metaphorically, to creep or glide or slither can refer to other things, sometimes positively, as when a light slowly moves under a door or a shadow passes across a wall, or as Swiss author Robert Walser has it in one of his short stories from 1917:

At such an hour I might sit dreaming or reading by lamplight in my room, and since the window would be open, the whole nocturnal world would come creeping in like a faithful friend to fill my heart with courage, comfort, and confidence.⁹

In an ambiguous passage from another of Walser German-language piece “The Aunt” (1918) irony begins to undermine the sentimental tone of the description, the repetition of diminutives and softening adjectives eating way at the positive sense of the text:

How beautiful, how friendly it had grown in the darkening west. Good green pastures crept tenderly. Gracefully, amiably beside me, all sorts of thoughts crept like fawning kittens at my heels....Dark human figures! And everything all around so deep, so primevally beautiful, so still, black, and soundless.¹⁰

More usually the metaphor is used negatively, as when a deadly white ray of moonlight shines through a distorting lens or stained-glass window to cast ominous tones of unnatural terror over a scene. A third instance, “The Sweetheart” (1924), from Robert Walser indicates how both ambiguities and ironies can shade away the clear positive sentimentality of the verb in contexts that point towards Gothic horror:

It’s nice for a woman to know she is respected by the master of her fate and worshipped by her lover. He crept like a dog, if one may so express oneself, around the castle and the luxury in which I reposed. Once I found myself in mortal danger, from which he rescued me.¹¹

Moreover, shocking as it may seem, this cluster of words describing a kind of physical movement also is related to the range of terms invented or given new meaning in association with the new concept of hysteria formed at the close of the nineteenth century to replace the traditional notion of a detached uterus that wanders through the female anatomy causing bizarre gestures and uncontrollable sensations. Adeline van Waning makes some pertinent remarks about the concept of the *self* useful in our current study, provided we adjust it to the experiences revealed in our study of the creepy qualities in several nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts:

⁹ Robert Walser, “Tobold (II)” in *Masquerade and Other Stories*, trans. Susan Bernofsky (London: Quartet Books, 1993) p. 88.

¹⁰ Walser, “The Aunt” in *Masquerade and Other Stories*, p. 106.

¹¹ Walser, “The Sweetheart” in *Masquerade and Other Stories*, p. 134.

We may describe the self as the center of experience and initiative. Self can be seen as the representation of a function of coherence, continuity, agency, and relationship that allows us to perceive ourselves as a single, integrated, subjective embodiment. Self is a dynamic configuration in an historical and cultural context, that not only includes what a person was but also anticipates what he or she will be. In this way we see the individual identity as embedded in the collective.¹²

In our view, however, drawing on psychohistorical notions, the ego or *Ich* is not central but often peripheral to the conscious or decision making activities of the mind. What it represents (in the root sense of image projection and introjection, memory manipulation, creative speculations and other modes of ambiguous interpretation of what arises from dark unconscious motives) is a mere illusion of coherence and continuity, since our sense of self as single, integrated and subjectively pure is a delusion constantly being re-constructed. Both the historical contexts in which this construction takes place are, to be sure, dynamic, but also different for individuals and communities, depending on language, traditional beliefs, and eccentric, often unique circumstances discussed by Annette Streecken-Fischer and Paul Parin.¹³

A key question anticipating Freudian psychoanalysis and its offshoot of Psychohistory thus tantalizingly appears in Collins' *The Moonstone* when one of the female characters asks desperately, as cited as our initial citation:

*"Is there a form of hysterics that bursts into words instead of tears?"*¹⁴

The ambiguity between an actual physical sensation (pain) and metaphorical description of psychological response to the sight, thought, dream or memory of such an experience is captured in these lines from Oscar Cook's early twentieth-century short story "Boomerang" in which a toxic earwig is placed in the ear of a character, eventually to make its way through his brain and exit from the other ear. Macy endures the real pain and his wife Rhona suffers from the imagining of what he is going through:

And so it went on, day by day. Alternate quiet and alternate pain, each day for Macy, for Rhona a hell of nerve-rending expectancy. Waiting, always waiting for the pain that crept and crawled and twisted and writhed and moved slowly, ever slowly, through and across Macy's brain.¹⁵

¹² Adeline van Wanang, "From Splitting to Mutuality, Beyond Heroism and Tragedy: Remarks on Peace, War, and Psychoanalytic Insights" *Mind and Human Interaction* 11:4 (2000) 272.

¹³ See Note 25.

¹⁴ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 212.

To gain a better understanding of this sense of the creeping agony, we turn to a few nineteenth-century English texts. In them, not only creeping and crawling are usually synonymous with the various descriptive, metaphorical and psychological phenomena experienced, but, adding a term like gliding to the series, authors were able to widen the range of imaginative events encompassed within the presumably historical and fictional representations.

For example, the narrative voice of author Ion L. Idriess tries to indicate the traumatic sense of disorientation felt in Barbara Thomson's metamorphosis during the 1840s from European traveller to indigenous native in a primitive mentality by speaking of her initial encounters with maritime monsters and jungle creatures, as well as people whom she sees as frightening savages whose words and actions seem meaningless and threatening. But at the same time, as the interpolated comments (marked by italics in the following passage) by the narrator stress, what Barbara sees, hears and feels during these events occur within her mind, in a mind under stress and anxiety:

The very air she breathed tasted and smelled was *overpoweringly* of leaves and moist earth. She rested awhile, but she was caged in by undergrowth. The quietness *overwhelmed* her. A rustling attracted her ear and eye; it was a snake slithering away [another variation on crawl, creep and glide]. She jumped up and pushed on. The sound of her *tortured* breathing was *frightening company*. A scrub bird whistled softly—it was peering down at her. She felt what it was like to be lost. What if at last she sank down with only the trees around her! And then—night!¹⁶

The statements ending with exclamation marks show the author attempting to collapse the distance between his well-crafted literary prose and the emotionally-charged feelings of his subject, between the calm communication of a modern (1920s Australian novelist turned anthropologist) writer and the shocked barely articulate mind of the frightened young captive.

She struggled on for another two hours, then *panicked*; tried to fight her way back to Magena. But she was only crawling deeper into the interior.¹⁷

Then a fully outsider's perspective takes over to diagnose her mental condition:

¹⁵ Cook, "Boomerang" p. 240. The boomerang is a hunting weapon used by Australian Aborigines. It is thrown into the midst of a flock of birds flying overhead, and then, as it returns to earth in the direction from which it was launched, some of the fowl follow it down where they can be killed or captured. It is, in other words, a weapon of deception, a cunning trick, something that is uncanny, insofar as it turns the peaceful into the threatening, it seems familiar and friendly but turns out to be invasive and dangerous; and it makes the ambiguous into something creepy.

¹⁶ Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 91.

¹⁷ Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 91.

It was an hysterical, bloodstained Barbara who collapsed at the forest edge...¹⁸

By calling her hysterical, Idriess gives us a link and a clue on how to connect these discussions of creepy crawling motions with the hysterical dances fashionable in Paris in the *fin-de-siècle*. For it will be less a description of how certain real or fantastic creatures move through the world or one's dreams, or even of how one feels in response to their presence in memories, rituals and narratives; but rather how strange the new kinds of dance seemed both to the performers and audiences who were aware of the spectacular motions of men and women suffering from the mental disease of hysteria. Not all suffering manifests, however, is dramatic gestures and howls, the *kvetching* and *kritsing* of Yiddish tradition, or in the pains that are bottled up inside, in "silent, secret, long enduring" self-pity and seasons of hidden martyrdom; these are the unseen and unheard pangs of suffering "often almost entirely void of outward vent or development."¹⁹

Hysteria can also present in terms of a more historical and culturally-determined set of symptoms. The term in the nineteenth century was at once a catch-all one for bizarre outbreaks of uncontrollable sounds and movements, and at the same time an historical term forcibly connected with ancient notions of a detached uterus that wandered around the female anatomy provoking such disorderly behaviours. In another of Wilkie Collins's novels, *The Moonstone*, an instance of the phenomenon is rendered in this way:

The hysterical passion swelled in her bosom—her quickened convulsive breathing almost beat on my face, as he held me back at the door....Sobs and tears burst from her. She struggled with them fiercely....she threw up her hands, and wrung them frantically in the air.²⁰

As another character in Wilkie Collins's short story "The Frozen Deep" reports, relating what her doctor had told her about "the hysterical malady":²¹

"He told me that such cases as Clara's were by no means unfamiliar to medical practice. 'We know,' he told me, 'that certain disordered conditions of the brain and the nervous system produce results quite as

¹⁸ Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, pp. 91-92.

¹⁹ Collins, *Basil*, Part I, vi, p. 19.

²⁰ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 315.

²¹ In *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins, it is called "an hysterical attack" and treated with "a dose of sol-volatile" (p. 86).

extraordinary as any that you have described—and there our knowledge ends. Neither my science nor any man’s science can clear up the mystery in this case’.”²²

Scientific approaches to hysteria changed in the course of the nineteenth century, so that it could become highly medicalized—and less ritualized and histrionic—and required, on the one hand, a “magnifying test”²³ to examine its specific features, including comparative studies of patients from diverse walks of life, ages and education; while, on the other, it was increasingly read as a text in its own right, a narrative, as it were, of its origins in the ontology of an individual’s personality and as a screen upon which the evolution of the rational mind has projected its repressed memories of primeval traumas. In this latter case, holding in abeyance the way in which the pre-psychoanalytic writers used “unconscious” in the sense of “unaware” or “instinctively”, the persona in Collins’ *Basil*, describes the phenomenon as close to what would be standard developmental psychology in the *fin-de-siècle*:

I went home at once. When I lay down to sleep, then the ordeal which I had been unconsciously preparing for myself throughout the day, began to try me. Every nerve in my body, strung up to the extremest point of tension, now at last gave way. I was possessed by a gloom and horror, caused by no thought, and producing no thought: the thinking faculty seemed paralysed within me, altogether.²⁴

There is an untoward conjunction of tones and generic discourses here, on the one hand, a close “magnifying-glass” detailing of his own physical condition in this state of mind which ought to bring him to a recognition of the psychological changes occurring in his mind; but which, on the other hand, are rendered in terms of a Gothic romance, the subjective language of universalized horror and delusions. Then Basil realizes that he has been pushed into a highly subjective world of almost pure feelings, emotions that cannot be put into words that adequately express their uniqueness and thus individuality, such a language—and it is also the language of gestures and setting—is ambiguous and misleading:

The physical and mental reaction, after the fever and agitation of the say, was so sudden and severe, that the faintest noise from the street now terrified—yes, literally terrified me.

²² Wilkie Collins, “The Frozen Deep” written first in 1856 as a play and then, with Dickens’s help turned into a short story; available online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1625/1625-h/1625-h>. For further background see, “The Frozen Deep—A Drama in Three Acts” online at http://www.wilkie-collins.info/play_frozen_deep. Both the play and the short story are based on the ill-fated Franklin Expedition to discover the Northwest passage.” See the *Wikipedia* entry “Franklin’s Lost Expedition” online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin%27s_lost_expedition.

²³ Collins, *Basil*, Part I, xii, p. 67.

²⁴ Collins, *Basil*, Part I, xii, p. 68.

Here he has to emphasize through repetition and a dash that what he is describing is a literal truth, a true experience, and not a vague ill-applied literary generalization. Terror consists of becoming highly-strung, with nerve representing the emotional (hormonal) flow of electro-chemical energies in his brain and down through the endocrine system of his entire body.

The whistling of the wind—which had risen since sunset—made me start up in bed, with my heart throbbing, and my blood all chill. When no sounds were audible, then I listened for them to come—listened breathlessly, without daring to move. At last, the agony of nervous prostration grew more than the child's horror of walking in the darkness, and sleeping alone on the bed-room floor, which had overcome me, almost from the first moment when I lay down.

What happens in a Gothic horror story as a display of grand passions in order to induce a sense of the sublime with its aesthetic submission to the natural forces of an irrationality higher than rhetorically formalized Reason, here comes to the narrator as a private regression into childish fears and anxieties. He feels haunted and mad, unable to sleep like a civilized adult in his bed, and overcome by the return of repressed trauma—hysterical behaviours that embody the post-traumatic experiences that separate humans from animals.

I groped my way to the table and lit the candle again; then wrapped my dressing-own round me, and sat shuddering near the light, to watch the weary hours out till morning.

As this novel proceeds, the substantial elements of the hysterical memories come further into focus, although, again, the emotion-laden formulae of the Gothic can only be used (absent any alternatives) with a sense of shock and embarrassment. The ritualized atmosphere of a dark and stormy night form the matrix in which Basil attempts to recall and interpret what happened to him once he has broken social conventions, the usually unquestioned taboos, in his choice of a wife and tumbled into a world of uncontrolled or uncontrollable emotions:

...and just at that moment, the storm began to rise to tis height. Hail mingled with the rain, and rattled heavily against the window. The thunder, bursting louder with each successive peal, seemed to shake the house to its foundations.²⁵

Here is the familiar projecting outwards of inner passions on to a natural events, albeit a cliché of the romances that were created in the late eighteenth century to signal an irrational universe of chaos and disorder that mirror the inner turmoil of frustrations and rage against the conventions and institutions of the ancient regime, the very mechanics of a phantasmagoria, with all its clunky wheels, gears, magic lanterns, smoke and mirror.

²⁵ Collins, *Basil*, Part II, iii, p. 81.

In these three sentences, by sheer force of will against the impending doom and gloom, Basil gropes—or crawls or creeps—his way to the table, to sit up in the candlelight, to await the anticipated ordeal of his wedding day, with all its weird and bizarre reshaping of a sexually consummated love.

As I listened to the fearful crashing and roaring that seemed to fill the whole measureless void of the upper air, and then looked round on the calm face of the man beside me—without one human emotion of any kind even faintly pictured on it—I felt strange, unutterable sensations creeping over me; our silence grew oppressive and sinister; I began to wish, I hardly knew why, for some third person in the room—for somebody else to look at and to speak to.²⁶

One might as well be reading Poe’s “Fall of the House of Usher” or any of a dozen other romances of the period that play on the emotional fallacy to render a state of mental collapse or madness. Here the situation induces the protagonist to react to the threateningly silent and mysterious figure by a sense of creepiness.

The story of Basil and Margaret continues, but the terms of generic horror do not deepen the understanding either the narrator or the reader gains of what is going on. The lightning flashes create “optical illusions,” making the setting one of “mystery,” full of secrets “which might be connected with his early life”.²⁷

Though Collins, like Dickens, his contemporary, friend and mentor, never quite grasped the dynamics of the mind struggling within itself to repress and censor out unwonted memories and feelings from a troubled past, both individual and group, there are moments in their novels when, putting aside the normal discourses of modern Victorian life, they almost express these mental struggles.²⁸ For instance, in *Basil*, the narrator remarks:

²⁶ Collins, *Basil*, Part II, iii, p. 81

²⁷ Collins, *Basil*, Part II, iii, pp. 84-85.

²⁸ As Annette Streeck-Fischer points out: “Parin and others have described that people of different cultures evolve different ego structures to suit the particular cultural sphere in which they live. The adaptation mechanisms are specific for the cultural and social conditions under which they have developed, because they represent responses to these conditions. These adaptation mechanisms serve to alleviate conflict. As a form of coping in the face of social challenge, they operate unconsciously, automatically and always immediately, permitting a conflict-free intercourse with the environment to which they are suited” in “Between Astonishment and Fear: Communication Problems in the Treatment of Children from the Former East Germany) *Mind and Human Interaction* 11:4 (2000) 262. We have several modifications to make in regard to this statement in order to explain why we take our examples from a period of about one century prior to the conditions under which we imagine ourselves living, the distance in time and space allowing for creative interpretations of the texts. First, we do not believe there is any automatic and immediate conflict-free intercourse with the environment ; instead there is an awkward, uncomfortable and ambiguous sense of relationship. Second, the fictional and historical

It was as if something were imprisoned in my mind, and moving always to and fro in it—moving, but never getting free.²⁹

In pursuit of the apparitions that seem unreal or at least supernatural to him, Basil at one moment chases after the ghosts of his own making—

I saw a vision that led me after it—a beckoning shadow, ahead, darker even than the night darkness³⁰—and then while gazing at the internal struggle happening within his own mind, fascinated and yet repelled by its implications, attempts to put his consciousness back into rational order:

In that awful struggle for the mastery of my own mind, all that had passed, all the horror of that horrible night, became as nothing to me. I raised myself, and looked up again, and tried to steady my reason by the simplest means—even by endeavouring to count all the houses within sight, the darkness bewildered me.³¹

Stepping back somewhat from the ordeal he has just experienced with its double perspective of inner and outer events frightening him, Basil then attempts to give the “the night scene of horror” a name:

In the hideous phantasmagoria of my own calamity on which I now looked, my position was reversed. Every event of the doomed year of my probation [during which he was to remain separated from his bride until she had reached a proper age for marrying, and also during which his own self-control was to be tested] was revived. But the night-scene of horror—through which I had passed, had utterly vanished from my memory. This lost recollection, it was the one unending toil of my wandering mind to recover, and I never got it back.³²

The sweet, innocent girl he had fallen in love with on a public conveyance, an omnibus, and whose father, a linen draper, mistrusted the motives of and feared as a ruse to seduce his daughter, turns out to be a grasping, manipulative vixen. If only he had been sensitive and

characters in these narratives we discuss have a feeling that there is something uncanny and thus threatening in their apprehension of the apparently real physical and human world around them; it seems at once familiar and strange, comforting and invasive, natural and unnatural (or even supernatural). Third, the intrusive and shocking phantoms they believe they perceive out there or crawling under their skin derive not only from their own pre-birth and early infantile experiences but from far more archaic trauma embedded in the sounds, images, gestures and intellectual codes they are surrounded by as soon as they develop the rudiments of a personal ego. Streeck-Fischer takes as her authorities two studies by Paul Parin, a Slovenian-born Swiss psychoanalyst: “Das Ich und die Anpassungsmechanismen” *Psyche* 35 (1977) 481-515; and “Die therapeutische Aufgabe und die Verleugnung der Gefahr” in *Krieg und Frieden aus psychanalytischer Sicht*, eds., P. Passett und E. Modens (München: Piper, 1983) 22-35. See Daniel M. A. Freeman, “Contributions of Crosscultural Studies to Clinical Theory and Practice: The Work of Paul Parin,” *Psychoanalytic Study of Society* 14 (1989): 281–299.

²⁹ Collins, *Basil*, Part III, i, p. 110.

³⁰ Collins, *Basil*, Part III, i, p. 109.

³¹ Collins, *Basil*, Part III, i, p. 109.

³² Collins, *Basil*, Part III, i, p. 111.

aware enough to have picked up the clues. The monstrous affair, then, begins to seem like a creation of his own self-delusions and naïveté, with each seemingly accidental step along the way revealed slowly as a trick to entrap him. The dreams and waking mental visions are mirror images of his own mind distorting the banalities of what the sub-title to the novel tells us are scenes of “modern life”, a period in which old conventions are falling apart, social boundaries crossed, and yet primary emotions still alive and triggering into action through archaic memories.³³ Instead of the dull humdrum life of the industrial city or the ruined scenes of rural villages and countryside, Basil finds himself—his mind—wandering (like a Gothic monster or a heroine in a Radcliffian romance) through a madhouse, the performed metaphor of the psychedelic comedy of the phantasmagoria:

How often my wandering thoughts thus incessantly and desperately traced and retraced their way over their own fever track, I cannot tell: but there came a time when they suddenly ceased to torment me; when the heavy burden that was on my mind fell off; when a sudden strength and fury possessed me, and I plunged down through a vast darkness into a world whose daylight was all radiant flame.³⁴

Examined closely, however, the beings racing about through this stormy vision, are at best impressionistic, hardly specifically designed to follow a representation of the unconscious mind wrestling with the ego that tries to filter out what is too dangerous to hold in consciousness. All becomes a meaningless swirl of light, colour and motion.

Giant phantoms mustered by millions, flashing white as lightning in the ruddy air. They rushed on me with hurricane speed; their wings fanned me with fiery breezes and the echo of their thunder-music was like the groaning and rending of an earthquake, as they tore me away with them on their whirlwind course.³⁵

What had earlier been the backdrop to a highly stylized reconstruction of the sublime in Gothic romances here falls apart into meaninglessness, what the early art critics (at about the same time as Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens were publishing their novels and short stories) believed had happened to painting when the Impressionists first exhibited their

³³ By archaic memories we do not mean some sort of Jungian archetypes shared by individuals and cultures across time but rather about memories of trauma and grief that unresolved over many generations and shaped into pathos-formulae in different ways through many traditions. Van Waning calls the “defensive collective crystallizations, binding grief that has not been mourned” and claims they “can be passed from generation to generation...” in “From Splitting to Mutuality” 274.

³⁴ Collins, *Basil*, Part III, i, p. 112.

³⁵ Collins, *Basil*, Part III, i, pp. 112-113.

works, no longer concerned with imitating Nature or History but their own aesthetic reactions to the atmospheric play of light and darkness on the external world.

The phantasmagoria was a play of artificial lights, sounds and tactile sensations pretending to be true and exposing its illusions as artificial. As the narrator expresses it in terms of what he takes to be a fearful event unclearly outside and inside himself:

Far down the corridors rise visions of flying phantoms, ever at the same distance before us—their raving voices clanging like the hammers of a thousand forges. Still on and on; faster and faster, for says, years, centuries together, till there comes, stealing slowly forward to meet us, a shadow—a vast, stealthy, gliding shadow—the first darkness that had ever been shed over that world of blazing ought! It comes nearer—nearer and nearer softly, till it touches the front ranks of our phantom troop....³⁶

As in the magic visions displayed in James Hogg's novels, especially *The Perils of Man*,³⁷ the archaic imagery of folklore and myth are cast over the Scottish countryside and its castles and churches as a magic lantern show (actually produced by a visiting monk for the amazement of the locals), this waking dream experienced by Collins's Basil, attempts to put into modern prose the sensationalist writings of the previous century.

In the narrative of the young Scotswoman marooned among the tribes of northern Australia's Trobriand Islands, the close attention to details in the descriptions of both persons and actions takes us closer to a deeper and more dynamic sense of the condition. In "novelizing" the naval records upon which the biography is constructed, the author moves towards the phantasmagoric processes exposed through the shocking experiences of a modern personality forced to pretend—and actually on occasion to become—a "native" or "savage" herself. Barbara Thomson, according to Idriess's retelling of her story gleaned from various travel accounts by explorers during the nineteenth century, self-consciously catches herself passing over from her old European mentality to that of her new identity as a Torres Strait islander:

She frowned—she wondered. She found herself really beginning to believe in some of these strange beliefs; had caught herself half believing in creepy mystical things more than once. It was foolish of course—and frightening too.

³⁶ Collins, *Basil*, Part III, i, p. 113.

³⁷ Norman Simms, "Phantasmagoria, Folklife and Beyond" in *Nationalism, Peasantry, Social Change in India: Festschrift* to Prof. K. K. N. Kurup (forthcoming).

In a more romantic vein, hardly reaching the point of an epistemological crisis, Sarah Bernhardt describes a moment in which a young Belgian count, Albert Styvens, fallen in love with the young actress Esperance whom he watched perform in Brussels at a special benefit performance, is questioned by his guardian about his intentions:

“You admit that you adore this young star of seventeen, the daughter of a philosopher of high standing. You do not intend, I suppose, to make her your mistress?”

Albert Styvens felt the blood run up into his temples, but he did not answer.

The Baron continued more determinedly, “You do not intend to propose her as a daughter-in-law to your mother?”

For an instant vertigo froze the young man’s being. His heart stopped beating, his throat contracted with a terrific pressure of blood. He did not answer a word.³⁸

This is a melodramatic moment rather than seriously tragic event in the novel. Questioned about whether he is in love with the girl and what his intentions are, the count is dumbfounded: he cannot answer for a minute or two, feeling his whole body clutch up because what he actually feels and thinks he wishes for himself are unthinkable choices for him given the difference in station between himself and Esperance; he cannot speak because he has no easy way of reconciling his desires and his public duty, the words failing to find articulation in accordance with decorum, the Baron voicing the statement the youth would speak but in a sarcastic way that seems to preclude either repetition or denial. Albert Styvens is caught between what it is possible to say and what is impossible to put into words, between his feelings and his ability to show those feelings in public, between what he has been thinking and what in his position in life is inconceivable by ordinary standards.

The physiological description given by Sarah Bernhardt, however, is more extreme than the actual fictional situation makes appropriate. For after a moment’s hesitation, catching his breath, tells his uncle, “I am going to answer you; please listen without interruption.” What the youth then says is more rhetorical than realistic, full of words and argumentation that exceed the propriety of the setting and the probabilities of the actions available to a young prince. In fact, the speech he makes is full of contradictions, and thus not at all like the moral and epistemological crises we have been discussing so far.

³⁸ Bernhardt, *The Idol of Paris*, Part II, Chapter 11.

Then, after a moment more of silence, he declared, “Yes, I am desperately in love with this young girl, and I am going to try everything, not to make her love me, for that she probably never will; but that she will let herself be loved. What will come of it, I have not the least idea. I want her and no one else. I will commit no disloyal act, I give my word for that. If she should become my wife, it would be with my mother’s permission. I beg you now, my dear baron, to say nothing further about it; I am old enough to regulate my life, as much as the divine guiding force which you call ‘Destiny’ permits.”

What Albert Stevens here proposes might, a generation or two later, be within the realm of possibility but not in the time-frame of Bernhardt’s narrative. The scene is, of course, the young Esperance’s own fantasy, and the older Sarah Bernhardt’s fanciful ideal of herself as a budding young actress. What is significant, though, can be seen in the terms used to describe the count’s physical state in those brief instants between being put on the spot by his uncle’s question and his own framing of a response: a state of frozen vertigo, a heart that stops beating, constriction of the throat by pressure of the blood. The rest is piffle.

It will be shown in due course that this state of ambiguity and ambivalence, suspended between belief systems and unable in the moment of confusion to decide which to accept as real or even appropriate to her condition at that time, relates to the way Europeans confronted the archaic images and feelings that they began to recognize as once having been considered a real version of the truth both by religious (usually Catholic) and state institutions (pre-Revolutionary monarchic) but now instead arising from both an over-active imagination and from deep unconscious and emotionally-active facets of the mind. At the time of the French Revolution, utilizing the technology of the Enlightenment to stage fright-inducing entertainments that revived those old sensations at the same time as exposing them as deliberate tricks, the phantasmagoria provided popular experiences to be reminded of the overthrown past and to enjoy the rational explanation of what used to make people believe in superstitious powers; at the end of the nineteenth century, the public displays of hysterical women and men and their imitators in music- and dance-halls taunted audiences with the notion that we were all capable of going mad and losing touch with civilization and reasonable behaviour. Instead of the by then old fashioned clunky machinery of the phantasmagoria—an elaborate combination of magic lantern, eerie musical concert and acrobatic tricks—there developed the cinematic screening of magic and spirit-rousing séances, ambiguous performances imitated on the dramatic stage and in symbolist novels.

Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 32, Number 1, 2018

ISSN- 0111-8854

@2018 Mentalities/Mentalités

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

Hysterical Response to Night-Crawling Creatures

In the pitch darkness of a jungle scrub they were camped one night when she awoke to a heavy, slowly moving pressure crossing her body. She clutched it, and the cry choked in her throat as she felt the slow terrifying pressure of the thing bulging under her fingers, breathed in some weird, dank smell, felt the paralyzing grip and drag as the lengthy thing crawled in utter silence across her. She stared up into the blackness of the leaves, powerless to move, powerless to cry out. Her heart almost stopped beating as slowly, inexorably, inch by inch, the pressing, gripping clamminess of the thing dragged itself across her bare stomach.³⁹

Here is Barbara Thomson again, this time with a party of islanders visiting the Australian mainland and staying in a hut with a mob of Aboriginals. The familiar pattern of the creepy thing begins, with an unknown presence sensed—felt, smelt, imagined—sending her outside her normal range of reactions, with “normal” including at once her almost forgotten European sensibilities and her newly acquired indigenous or “savage” emotional responses, and then moving towards the revelation of something which, while remaining frightening and threatening, belongs to the natural world. To a certain degree, even among the Aboriginals, who are strange to her own fellow islanders, the process of wakening into disorientating fear and then coming to rest, as it were, in a more familiar reality runs its traditional pattern of narration.

She seemed to live a paralyzing life-time before at last she felt the end of it dragging way. She leapt up with a scream and flung herself upon the startled Boroto, clinging to him with a strength that amazed him. In an instant all were upon their feet, the men’s eyes gleaming as they peered into the darkness for the enemy. It was only when one of them stirred the coals and lit a torch of bark that they knew what had happened. With a grunt the aboriginal pointed to the python’s track across the ashes.⁴⁰

In another episode close in time to the one we have just examined, Barbara meets with a snake while walking through the tropical forest, and again Idriess moves in and out of a representation of the traumatized castaway’s fears and anxieties as she experiences them at the limits of her mind’s ability to articulate the feelings that overwhelm her and the dispassionate and diagnostic prose of the modern narrator; while at the same time, coded into the trigger-language of a tradition this author is not fully aware of is the sequence of *Pathosformeln*: creep, crawl, glide and their other variants in contemporary English; and yet Idriess does attempt to grasp that otherness manifest in the afterlife or *Nachleben* of these terms :

³⁹ Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 209.

⁴⁰ Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 93.

She stared. *Shambling* [another variant] out from the ravine mouth was *a something, a monstrosity* neither tree nor giant bird nor man but a living thing reminiscent of all three—a *fantasy from prehistoric ages*. Trembling plumes, shivering leaf and vine under the towering mask of the markai, Spirit of death. It came *gliding* up through the centre of the amphitheatre to pause by the spirit shrine. The *gliding* thing was ten feet high. It chilled Barbara.⁴¹

At this stage in her living among the tribesmen of the islands, the young Scottish girl does not realize she is constantly under surveillance by the elders of the diverse tribes, as well as by jealous young girls suspicious of her motives in inserting herself as a marital choice among them, nor of “the age-old totem laws”⁴² governing all of local life-ways and symbolized into the geographical features, human-made objects and architecture of the islands:

The illusion of gliding was perfect, helped by the grotesquely patterned leaf petticoat stretching almost to the feet, kept in tautened shape with ribs of cane.

The forest monster is not yet seen by Barbara for what it is, a masked dancer in a ritual played around her, part of her initiation into the tribal ways and a warning by those who distrust her among the diverse villagers she meets on this and nearby islands. Yet Idriess’s novel-*cum*-anthropological treatise (which he draws from several mid-nineteenth-century reports by British vessels exploring northern Australia and the Torres Straits contains anachronistic terms and out-of-date attitudes⁴³ towards the peoples of the region observed in the years of their first encounters with Europeans (whom they take for *Lamars* or white-faced ghosts gliding past in their great canoes and occasionally dropping off precious pieces of iron and steel, coins and tools, glass mirrors and other bits of flotsam and jetsam).

She partly felt but did not fully realize what a dreadful position she was in. Under that frightening costume was the Zogo-man, fresh come from the great Augud in the holy of holies in the depths of the ravine.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 93.

⁴² Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 92. Cp. What is said a few pages later about “the terrible dangers of the age-old beliefs and violent revenges of primitive man” (p. 95).

⁴³ Not just the racist, colonialist sense of superiority created by a misreading of Darwinian evolutionary theory as a justification for conquest by European powers, but also by over-generalized notions of totem and taboo fashionable at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth. Idriess inserts his own sceptical mentality into the text when he remarks, “It would be fascinating to know just where , and how, and why in the vanished mists of early man’s upward toil upon earth the belief in the dogai [spirits] had been born” (Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 95).

⁴⁴ Idriess, *Isles of Despair*, p. 93.

Before we move on, however, let us turn back for a moment to the description of the young Scotswoman pushing her way through the tropical rainforest:

Trembling plumes, shivering leaf and vine under the towering mask of the markai, Spirit of death.

What trembles in the jungle or under the skin (the sensation of anxiety and disgust) and what shivers through the leaves or just below the surface of the sea is creepy, part of the “language of hysterics”⁴⁵ that rather than spoken in discursive, propositional statements, comes through neurotic signs on the body, ominous features of the environment, or merged into the non-rhetorical discourses of the modern novel (including fictional and historical biographies and autobiographies).

The Nightmare and the Metaphoric Horror

The questions we ask of biography change as we change, as society itself changes. To that extent, biography is a constant mirror of our aspirations and our anxieties. And biographies themselves, certainly as works of information, age, and date—they get superannuated. While I think a novel is always itself, it doesn’t grow old in the same way. It may go out of fashion, but it remains an independent work of the imagination. Biographies are cumulative, contingent, so to speak. They may begin to creak!⁴⁶

Clunky as the machinery of the historical phantasmagoria actually was when staged before its original audiences in the nineteenth century, this contraption was shocking and vivid enough to pass relatively smoothly into the realm of literary allusion, and more significantly into the ways in which novelists (and they were often both the writers of real and fictional biographies, the difference between them less than Richard Holmes sees in our own contemporary genres, the earliest “novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth century unabashedly passing themselves off as “true adventures” and “histories” of rogues, whores and celebrity sailors).

When the various trigger words in this literary *topos* come together, whether or not there is considered to be an archaic reality lurking within the phenomenon or merely a shocking

⁴⁵ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 190.

⁴⁶ Richard Holmes, *The Art of Biography No. 7*. Interviewed by Lucas Wittmann” *The Paris Review* 223 (2017) online at https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/7090/richard-holmes-the-art-of-biography-no-7-richard-holmes?utm_source=Issue223.

surprise to indicate an emotional disturbance in the contact between the fictional witness and an illusion conjured up out of romantic fears, the reader (guided by the narrator and perhaps by the author) form part of the afterlife of some long repressed and forgotten cultural trauma.

For instance, there is a long passage in Dicken's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) which begins with the central character, the still sub-adolescent Nell, in a state of "great terror" —she is fearful of the monstrous and grotesque dwarf Daniel Quilp who is following her to abduct her and her grandfather and force them back to London.⁴⁷ Nell seems to fall deeper and deeper into a sleep and into which state of heightened anxiety she sees or imagines or dreams of a shadowy phantom present in her bedroom. Until the scene ends, the figure is not identified, and seems to be Quilp.

A figure was there. Yes, she had drawn up the blind to admit the light when it should be dawn, and there between the foot of the bed and the dark casement, it crouched and slunk along, groping its way with noiseless hands, and stealing round the bed. She had no voice to cry for help, no power to move, but lay still, watching it.⁴⁸

On it came—on, silently and stealthily, to the bed's head. The breath so near her pillow, that she shrunk back into it, but lest those wandering hands should light upon her face. Back again it stole to the window—then turned its head towards her.⁴⁹

The dark form was a mere blot upon the lighter darkness of the room, but she saw the turning of the head, and felt and knew how the eyes looked and ears listened. There it remained, motionless as she. At

⁴⁷ An ironic allusion to Dicken's character is found in Vernon Routh's short story "The Black Creator" as the grotesque servant of the evil and sadistic Diaz Volo. Routh, who seems to be otherwise unknown, had this story published for the first time in van Thal, ed., *The Second Pan Book of Horror Stories*, pp. 169-193). When the narrator arrives on the mysteriously bleak island upon which he thinks he is to work as a scientific assistant to Dr. Volo, "Almost immediately the door [to the typically Gothic castle] was opened by the largest man I had ever seen. He stood inside the door, holding it open, and I could not see his head and shoulders till I stepped inside. He was fully seven feet tall, and of an enormous physique, with hands literally like hams" (p. 173). Then, a few sentences later, as part of the barely hidden network of references to other fantasy tales (e.g., "Somerset Maugham's story of the white man in the wilds who dressed for dinner by himself every night" pp. 176-177; this points to Maugham's 1924 story "The Outstation" about a certain Mr. Warburton, self-exiled to remotest Borneo, where, though the only white man, insists on the formalities of English civilization, and thus revealing his own ridiculous and grotesque status), the parodic connection to *The Old Curiosity Shop* is made: "To call this giant [not Dicken's dwarfish villain] Quilp was a hideous joke that sorted well with all that was happening....His head was entirely hairless, a horrible pinkish bald globe, and on his face was what I later found to be a perpetual grin, though which his huge inhuman teeth, yellow and fanged, were to be seen constantly fanged like an enraged animal [perhaps Lewis Carrol's Cheshire Cat] His back and shoulders were hunched [like Quasimodo in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the *bossu* not being named in the original title], no doubt in the constant effort to adjust his height to normal-sized doors and structures [like Alice during her nightmarish adventures in the subterranean regions of Wonderland]" p. 174).

⁴⁸ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 235.

⁴⁹ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 235.

length, still keeping the face towards her, it busied its hands in something, and she heard the chink of money.⁵⁰

Though this last notice of the sound of coins should alert the little girl, as it does the reader, as to whom the figure—“the dreadful shadow”—is and what is going on, the child is too frightened to see through the mist of her dream anything but the possibility of a ghostly presence.⁵¹ At that point, despite the many clues throughout the novel suggesting Daniel Quilp is a nasty little avaricious and sexualized creep of a Jew, the sound of the coins identifies the crawling creature as Nell Trent’s own grandfather, an old man torn apart by his obsession with gambling to make up the money to pay for her safe journey into womanhood and his willingness to sacrifice her maidenhood for cash. He is never named in the novel, and thus could almost be taken for a distorted mirror-double or horrible *doppelgänger* of Quilp, on the model of the later literary invention of Robert Louis Stevenson in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

To see how powerful are the passions locked into the words of this *topos* or formula of supernatural implications in a scene that eventually turns out to be explicable as generated by the emotions of the participants and the narrator of the text through the daylight normality of the episode itself, look at how bland is account by Kate Cambor of how Léon Daudet awake to the unusual (uncanny, bizarre, disturbing) presence in his room on the self-same night that Jean-Martin Charcot died of a pulmonary edema whilst on a walking tour in Burgundy:

The night of Charcot’s death, Léon, who was taking the waters at Uriage, was woken up at around three in the morning by *a strange phenomenon*. He perceived *a presence* at the door, and it slowly moved across the length of the room. It was his old teacher, Jean-Martin Charcot, and he was wearing a shirt of an *impossible* whiteness. The shirt was open at the neck, and the man was clutching at his heart. ‘I knew immediately...that something bad had happened to the great man, whose silhouette and work had so strongly made *an impression* on my youth,’ he later recalled. (Emphasis added)⁵²

Aside from the few words I have underlined in this passage, the whole description is understated and robbed of its power to trigger archaic memories of traumatic experience. If, however, instead of “slowly moved across the length of the room” we put in “slouched” or

⁵⁰ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 235.

⁵¹ Cp. Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* *where the moral situation is turned upside down and inside out*: “My heart’s darling, you are a Thief! My hero whom I love and honour, you have crept into my room under cover of the night, and stolen my Diamond!” (p. 312)

⁵² Kate Cambor, *Gilded Youth: Three Lives in France’s Belle Époque* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009) p. 1356.

“glided”, suddenly there would be a dimension added that is uncanny and frightening; and this would electrify the terms emphasized by italics. Here is how the *unheimlich* manifests in what Robert Walser calls “A Flaubert Prose Piece” (1926-1927):

Familiar sights, the people, carriages, shop windows and so forth, tended for the time being to lead him into a kind of melancholy, but this in turn provided him with the most amusements. Odd, wasn't it, that he failed to think of this woman who, he believed he could assume, was with him wherever he went, her image foremost in his figure-creating consciousness, whereby the figures meant are by no means strangers and thus are rather strange. “How quickly strange things have become familiar, how things I know now estrange me” was among the many thoughts that came to him.⁵³

The “strange phenomenon” would shimmer with the possibility of a supernatural event, the “presence” would become luminous and numinous in its implications, and “impression” would gain the sense of ancient feelings creeping up out of the repressed pains of the unconscious mind. These emergent phantoms that glide confusedly (in “psychic disarray”)⁵⁴ out of the mists (the “shell”) of ontological and psychological repression, and at first, in the conscious ego are misinterpreted “as that which we fallaciously designate ourselves (the ‘kernel’), whereas each of these phantom memories—raw pains, anxieties, unfulfilled desires—

can create a dead area within the psyche, an area signalled by the phantasmic (by fugues or paronomasias) where the afflicted individual compulsively repeats, acts out, or stages displaced representations of the repressed secret.⁵⁵

What is constructed just below the surface of this citation and the discussions around it in the authorities we are dealing with is nothing less than the structure of the mind conceived of as a phantasmagoria, with images projected out of the darkness (hidden in a dark illusion of rational and rationalizing control) and seemingly passed through the lenses of a contracting and expanding system of magic mirrors and onto the smoky mist that fills the ego's picture of itself. This picture is not so much made up of a series of symptoms (or allegories in a traditional moral drama) but of shockingly grotesque and triggering moments of energy cathecting the mind's search for a meaningful self. In the words of Ezra Jennings taken from his journal cited in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, these kinds of ambiguous

⁵³ Robert Walser, “A Flaubert Prose Piece” in *Masquerade and Other Stories*, p. 177.

⁵⁴ Miles, “Melville's *Pierre* and the Origins of the Gothic” 169. This is an allusion to the work of Nicolas Abraham and Marie Torok.

⁵⁵ Miles, “Melville's *Pierre*,” 169. He alludes here to Nicolas Abraham, “Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology,” *Critical Inquiry* 13 (1987) 287-292.

manifestations of old-fashioned magic and superstition seem “like a piece of trickery, akin to the trickery of mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the like.”⁵⁶

But in another mid-nineteenth-century literary example, Charles Reade’s *Cloister and the Hearth* (1861), however, the text seems almost forcedly permeated (“farced”, one might say⁵⁷) by the words and images that signal the archaic trope about to be described: the horrible event seen is introduced by a whole series of ominous warnings—

The strange glance...enemy to the death...he glided round the angle of the tower...fully expecting to see no supernatural appearance, but some cruel and treacherous contrivance...he stole forth, a soft but brave hand crept into his...this new peril...⁵⁸

Then the description of the phenomenon occurs, beginning with the state of mind of the two witnesses, Gerard Eliassoen, the young would-be artist and Margaret his intended bride, both of them attempting to flee from the authorities who wish to separate them and return them to their respective families, and then quickly becoming a scene out of a Gothic mystery novel set in fifteenth-century Netherlands. The key signals to such a literary genre are here emphasized:

No sooner was *the haunted tower* visible, than a sight struck their eyes *that benumbed them* as they stood. More than halfway up the tower, *a creature with a fiery head*, like an enormous glowworm [sic], was steadily mounting the wall: the body was dark, but its outline visible through the glare of the head, and whole creature not much less than four feet long.⁵⁹

The bright light here of the fiery torch illuminating the dwarf’s head comes back to haunt the novel when the protagonist finds himself caught in an inn by various villains, and in this fracas he attempts to frighten his assailants by making the largest of the thugs, whom he has just killed, glow like phosphorous.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the gang of thieves persist in climbing the stairs where the hero Gerard is hidden with the glowing corpse:

⁵⁶ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 357.

⁵⁷ *Farced* in the sense of stuffed like a sausage (forced meats) and ready to burst open on the grill or supersaturated, a *satura*, where incompatible genres, cacophonous tones, epistemologically jarring mimetic levels and other rhetorical categories crash into one another to form a satiric perspective on life.

⁵⁸ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, p. 43.

⁵⁹ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 119.

Presently they began to crawl and crawl down towards the bolt, but with infinite slowness and caution. In so doing, they crept into the moonlight. The actual motion was imperceptible, but slowly, slowly, the fingers came out whiter and whiter; but the hand between the main knuckles and the wrist remained dark.⁶¹

At which point Gerard slashes away at the threatening hand, severing the wrist “with two swift blows”. The action then reverses itself as the villain attempts to escape, so that the scene more and more resembles a Gothic romance as reproduced in a phantasmagoria.,

The wounded man moved, and presently crawled down to his companions on the stairs, and the kitchen door was shut.⁶²

But in the first scene of the novel dealing with the strange double apparition at the tower, this monstrous glow-worm is only part of performance that the two young fugitives observe in a state of benumbed horror, again offered here with key terms italicised, signalling to the modern audience the points of convergence between the author’s attempt to reproduce an episode in a Gothic romance and the revelation of a comical revelation of ordinary reality intruding into the imaginary experience, just as happened in phantasmagorical performances on the nineteenth-century stage. Thus back in the first elaborate scenario of the *The Cloister and the Hearth*:

At the foot of the tower stood *a thing in white*, that looked exactly like the figure of a female. Gerard and Margaret *palpitated with awe*.⁶³

The young man cries out in surprise and fear: “The rope! The rope! It is going up the rope,” and in a voice described as “gasp[ed],” indicating that the mundane detail of the cable leading from the ground to the top of the tower is the means by which the unknown, uncanny being (“it”) makes its ascent.

The description continues, following the perspective of the frightened witnesses to the mysterious phenomenon:

As they *gazed*, the glowworm [sic] disappeared in Gerard’s late prison, but its light illuminated the cell inside and reddened the window. The *white figure* stood motionless below.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 120.

⁶² Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 120.

⁶³ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, p. 43.

⁶⁴ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, p. 43

In this later scene in Reade's novel, the effect on spectators, including many of the participants, is that, as an oft-repeated oral report, projecting the memory forward into folk consciousness:

Mayhap if these bones could tell their tale they would make true men's flesh creep that heard it.⁶⁵

Before making his revelation of who or what these strange creatures are that the young couple see, the narrator ventures a psychological explanation as to why the scene is interpreted in Gothic terms.⁶⁶ Such a paragraph casts a veil of irony or at least of deliberate mystification—or ambiguity—over the reader's eyes, delaying the more naturalistic explanation of what has been set forth.

Such as can retain their senses after the first prostrating effect of the supernatural are apt to experience terror in one of its strangest forms, a wild desire to fling themselves upon the terrible object. It fascinates them as the snake the bird. The great tragedian Macready used to render this finely in *Macbeth*, at Banquo's second appearance. He flung himself with averted head at the horrible shadow. This strange impulse now seized Margaret. She put down Gerard's hand quietly, and stood bewildered; then, all in a moment, with a wild cry, darted towards the spectre. Gerard not aware of the natural impulse I have spoken of, never doubted the evil one was drawing her to her perdition. He fell on his knees.⁶⁷

The opening statement is cast as a generally applicable moral principle of psychology, as though the bizarre and uncontrolled impulse of the ordinary person who experiences the illusion of a terrible apparition were to lunge at the supernatural being, an instinct analogous to that of a serpent in the wild. But then the direction of the explanation shifts to a more complex cultural analogy: what Margaret feels and does is a deliberate deceit, similar to that of a contemporary stage actor who pretends to be a mad character in a play and simulates the rage of someone confronted by a guilt-born phantom of the person he has murdered, in this case Banquo in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Act 3 Scene 4). Unlike the natural impulse of the

⁶⁵ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 124.

⁶⁶ Not unsurprisingly, much later when Gerard's brother and sister recall the magical apparition at the tower, they are not aware of how they looked to everyone else, including the narrator who couched his words in ominous terms alluding to Gothic horror and the supposedly revealing phantasmagoria show. Giles the dwarf speaks awkwardly for himself and his crippled sister Kate when he says: "At first we did properly frighten one another, through the place had his bad name, and our poor heads being so full o' divels, and we whitened a bit in moonshine.' Then a bit later, "She and an old man she brought found means and wit to send him up a rope. There 'twas dangling from his prison, and our Giles went up it. When first I saw it hang, I said, 'This is glamour.' But when the frank lass's arms came round me, and her bosom did beat on mine, and her cheeks wet, then said, "'Tis not glamour: 'tis love.' Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XLV, p. 174. The term *glamour* here is etymologically the same as grammar, that is, a verbal charm or spell, and by extension anything magical or supernatural.

⁶⁷ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, p. 43.

snake, the gestures of Macbeth by the tragedian William Charles Macready (1793 – 1873) are a studied, rhetorically-expressed imitation of what supposedly represents fear.

How Margaret behaves is divided into three components. First, she sees what Gerard also sees, the strange creature shimmying up the rope to the top of the tower; but where the youth is benumbed and palpitating in fear, the young female understands in the sense of an event to be entered into. It is “glamour”,⁶⁸ in the old sense connected to “grammar” or a verbal enchantment (a song that modifies the emotional state of those involved) that uses words to manipulate appearances and even transform the underlying form of things, her “superior intelligence” registers the actions being informed to be facts that must be dealt with in order for the couple to save their lives and to make their escape to Italy where Gerard can complete his education as an artist and thus gain the livelihood that will make their eventual return home to be a well-to-do family.

Thus, in the second component of the action, deliberately and quietly, she disengages her hand from her fiancé, and, after a brief moment of bewilderment, during which she also separates her feelings of helplessness she shared with Gerard, she behaves with what seems like the instinctiveness of the serpent who fascinates its prey before striking: “with a wild cry, darted towards the spectre.” The one who was fascinated or mesmerized into immobility at the first sight of the amazing sense then becomes them creature of natural instincts to attack the threatening presence of an unknown adversary.

Meanwhile, Gerard, “not aware of the natural impulse I have spoken of,” remains fixated in the immediate delusion, assuming the glow worm is the embodiment of some demonic being who, like a serpent that fascinates, draws his beloved to her perdition. In brief, not only are there two characters who act differently to the same scene unfolding before them, one active, one passive, one who leaps into action on natural instinct, the other petrified by fear of a culturally-created scenario of Gothic horror, but there is a third player on this stage. The narrator (“I”) who addresses the modern reader (both the original audience for the novel and our own selves coming to the book long after it has become a part of the literary tradition and often through the further medium of a classroom assignment) provides supposed insight into

⁶⁸ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, p. 44.

the motivations of each of the young characters in the play he describes, and prides himself on his superior knowledge that he can impart to the reader. As in a fully-staged phantasmagoria, the audience wish to be duped by being in a situation where they are reminded of the old fears they felt under a regime that believed in magic and awe to control society but are comforted by the knowledge of the director of the show and the exposure of the mechanisms by which he projects the terrible images of the past left behind by the Revolution of 1789.

Having trained essentially towards the priesthood, a profession he rejects, however, to reach the stage of an exorcist, when confronted with this uncanny apparition, Gerard cries out “*Exorcizo vos. In nomine beatae Maeriae, exorciso vos*” (I exorcise you. In the name of the Blessed Mary, I exorcise you.” This incantation, “shrieked” in a moment of panic, nevertheless has its effect, and “the spectre utter[ed] a feeble cry of fear” and very soon he saw the ghastly shape kneeling at Margaret’s knees, and heard it praying piteously.”⁶⁹ In due course, the two mysterious players in this phantasmagoria are revealed by the narrator and reveal themselves through their reversion to normal discourse concerning the trick they are attempting to perform to aid the young couple out of their difficulties. The glow worm creeping up the rope is none other than Gerard’s dwarfish brother Giles and the white spectral form waiting at the bottom his crippled sister Kate, and their appearance, looked at rationally, indicates the costumes they are wearing. Before Giles began to shimmy up the rope—the means by which Gerard made his escape from the cell a short time earlier—his deformed younger sibling “fastened [a] lantern to his neck” giving him the appearance of a glow worm, a “fiery-headed thing” or “fire-headed imp”:

And so, with his huge arms, and his legs like feathers, Giles went up the rope faster than his brother came down it.⁷⁰

It may be said that the narrator (or the author) has piled on the grotesque imagery, accompanying the suppositious appearance of demonic creatures dancing through the night with sudden fits and starts of action, as well as cries of delight and horror. The two siblings are trying to get into the tower in order to take away the parchment documents that will give

⁶⁹ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, [44.

⁷⁰ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XI, p. 44,

the family leverage in any legal proceedings against the authorities of the town that are colluding against Gerard and Margaret, and in this surprise and shock the lovers who are unprepared to identify their would-be helpers, the scene is filled with what seems like supernatural beings, inexplicable actions and incomprehensible noises . But the stage business does not stand on its own; all effects are mediated by the narrative voice addressing the readers with prompts towards their emotional reactions and directions to the self-deception played out and eventually a resolution into a confused and yet all too realistic plot.

What transpires results not from the commonplace Gothic tropes, but the narrator's deliberate deferral of exposing the trick of imagery and verbal allusion, that makes it seem the text has slithered out of an attempt at romantic or at least historical fiction into what Robert Miles calls "a semantic dead zone,"⁷¹ one in which normal literary expectations are silenced and cultural values undercut, where "the logic of the phantom that those infected by it can no longer make connections between signified and signified."⁷² It is an "inner emptiness" because everything that could be in it from the past or the present of normal development has been replaced by mindless pain.⁷³ The intensity of the mental ache is so great the conscious ego, no matter how it tries to compensate by creating alternatives or denying the hurt, is always there distorting everything else around it. "If we...do not understand that this inner emptiness actually exists," says Arno Gruen, "that there are indeed people without an identity, then we will not recognize the dangerous consequences of this phenomenon,"⁷⁴ which is why novels and similar "imaginative" writings are so important to analyse and take seriously.

Nevertheless, the gang of thieves persist in climbing the stairs where the hero Gerard is hidden with the glowing corpse:

Presently they began to crawl and crawl down towards the bolt, but with infinite slowness and caution. In so doing, they crept into the moonlight. The actual motion was imperceptible, but slowly, slowly, the

⁷¹ Cp. the discussion of Abram and Torok previously noted.

⁷² Robert Miles, "Melville's Pierre and the Origins of the Gothic" 172.

⁷³ Arno Gruen, "Surrendering Identity: Hermann Göring and Rudolf Hess" *Mind and Human Understanding* 12:1 (2001) 48.

⁷⁴ Gruen, "Surrendering Identity" 48.

fingers came out whiter and whiter; but the hand between the main knuckles and the wrist remained dark.⁷⁵

At which point Gerard slashes away at the threatening hand, severing the wrist “with two swift blows”. The action then reverses itself as the villain attempts to escape, so that the scene more and more resembles a Gothic romance as reproduced in a phantasmagoria.,

The wounded man moved, and presently crawled down to his companions on the stairs, and the kitchen door was shut.⁷⁶

In the novel we are discussing, where such an emptiness manifests itself, the result belies the intentions of the fictional narrator and the expectations of the real audience. The whole episode lacks depth of character, subtlety of psychological processes, and significance to the argument of the novel. Thus, as much as particular words, images and gestures can be matched to a series of other texts that we will examine, the evocation of archaic passions fails to illuminate modern states of mind and imaginative speculations on the meaning of culture and society. The cathecting of archaic traumatic moments encapsulated in Aby Warburg’s notions of *Pathosformeln*, *Nachleben* and iconography can be seen to occur in Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade and Bram Stoker, using the method of midrashic readings, but these novelistic instances are only real—or rather, have historical significance—insofar as we recognize them as textual events and interpret them accordingly.

Returning to an instance we touched on briefly earlier in this essay, we find a modern description of the inner (psychological) meaning of the term *creepy* in Oscar Cook’s short story “Boomerang” in the course of analysing the imagined sufferings of Clifford Macy who has maliciously had a tropical earwig inserted into his ear. While others, especially his wife Rhona, hear and witness his agony in his intermittent screams and writhing, it is their “nerve-rending expectancy” of the invisible and unimaginable climax that proves most unsettling:

Waiting, always waiting for the pain that crept and crawled and twisted and writhed and moved slowly, ever slowly, through and across Marcy’s brain.⁷⁷

When the earwig creeps from one side of the victim’s rain to another, through the emptiness of his dysfunctional personality, those inflicting the pain themselves manifest a similar

⁷⁵ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 120.

⁷⁶ Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chapter XXXIII, p. 120.

⁷⁷ Cook, “Boomerang” p. 240.

defect. The pain and humiliation of separation, abandonment and abuse—each traumatic sensation ranged on a continuum of neglect and cruel abuse⁷⁸—continues to reverberate through the culture that feels compelled to retell such stories, in one way or another, in whatever medium is popular at the time. Each trauma is a “deep wound to the mind, heart and nerves that will not heal”,⁷⁹ but continues to fester and irritate all memories and sensory inputs from a real and hostile world, at best coded or embedded into trigger-like pathos formulae that generation by generation accrete both defensive disguises and hidden traps where points of aggravation lie, and which not only turn out against scapegoated substitutes for the originally wounded self but also inwards again to stimulate further wounds in a wild dance of sadistic pleasures. Not only can parents pass on to their progeny many times over these formulated conceits of cathected imagery and verbal formulae, but through rituals and literary *topoi* the entire community can inter-inanimate related participants in the community waking-dream.⁸⁰

Hence, the next step in the development of the idea of what constitutes the *creepy* feeling associated with moral disgust psychological horror comes with the transference of both the motions of the crawling or slithering creature that arouses such an emotional response and the emotion as a symbol of the repugnance as an embodiment of evil, that is, when what is creepy is experienced as one’s own skin crawling. In one sense, the externalization of disgust to a mimetic set of motions tangible if not visible in the body of the person who observes and remembers, thinks about or imagines the horror confronting him or her, can be credited to a process of imagination that “was growing traitor”⁸¹ to the mind of this witness. When, that is, the mind bubbles over with emotionally-charged anxieties and psychological distortions often dredged up out of the individual’s own archaic past and confusion begins to reign in the mind, obliterating common sense and reason, perceptions of reality are replaced by “some hideous fantasy.”⁸² At that point, the narrator of Cook’s “Boomerang,” listening to the report on the man tortured by the earwig crawling its way through Macy’s brain, experiences

⁷⁸ Gruen, “Surrendering Identity, 43.

⁷⁹ Rudy Binion cited by Jerrold Atlas in “The Never-Ending War: Is Iran Next” *Psychohistory News* 23:4 (2004) 40.

⁸⁰ In this sentence I pass these insights of Adeline van Wanang through through the filter of Aby Warburg’s *Kulturgeschichte*; cp. van Wanang, “From Splitting to Mutuality” 278.

⁸¹ Wells, “Pollock and the Porroh Man” p. 53.

⁸² Routh, “The Black Creator: p. 174.

“the growing sense of ticklish horror that was creeping over me,” until it “was more than I could bear.”⁸³

A good example of this feeling of moral repugnance experienced as something slithery under the skin can be seen in this paragraph from Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* when Edith, the recently married second Mrs. Dombey, tells her husband, “with no more fear of him than of a worm” what she truly thinks of him:

“What should I say of honour or of chastity to you!” she went on. “What meaning would it have to you; what meaning would it have from me! But if I tell you that the lightest touch of your hand makes my blood cold with antipathy; that from the hour I first saw and hated you, to now, when my instinctive repugnance is enhanced by every minute’s knowledge of you I have since had, you have been a loathsome creature to me which has not its like on earth; how them?”⁸⁴

To the modern reader—and we presume the candid mid-nineteenth-century reader as well—the sentiments expressed refer beyond moral disgust at all Mr. Dombey stands for and even to something more than his age and physical appearance. When she says “my instinctive repugnance is enhanced by every minute’s knowledge of you I have since had,” she must be alluding to the sexual contacts she was legally obliged to allow her husband as a Victorian woman. Of course, Edith is no inexperienced young woman when she marries Paul Dombey; there had been a previous marriage, and she had grown up into womanhood knowing what was expected of her under her mother’s tutelage, a pressured education as a “gold digger”, convinced that her won and as well as her mother’s status—their very livelihood and comfort—depends on the daughter sacrificing romantic love and sexual compatibility to ensnare a rich and socially powerful man. Mr. Dombey’s cold exterior and manifest aloofness, his cruelty to his children (especially his adoring and obedient daughter Florence) makes his marriage to Edith more creepy—“a loathsome creature”—once she meets with and comes to love Florence.

In one late chapter of the novel, when Mr. Carker, racing away from a failed effort to gain the confidence and love of Edith Dombey after she has sought refuge in Dijon, his [panicky ride to escape from the demons that chase him, and which are, to be sure, more from within than without, is described in impressionistic terms, the syntax losing its grip on the narrative

⁸³ Cook, “Boomerang” p. 239.

⁸⁴ Dickens, *Dombey & Son*, Volume II, p. 394.

coherence of the text, the sense of his own mind at work falling into what would later be known as a stream of consciousness, there is a return of the imagery of the creepy things that turn him into the source of this fearful madness:

And then there was a postyard, ankle-deep in mud, with steaming dunghills and vast outhouses half ruined; and looking on this *dainty* prospect, an immense old, shadeless, glaring, stone chateau, with half its windows blinded, and green damp crawling *lazily* over it, from the balustrade terrace to the taper tips of the extinguishers upon the turrets.⁸⁵ (emphasis added)

Lurking within this faecal-laden landscape, with its surface of muck and offal, the creeping presence of the monster that emerges from deep in the *topos* of the uncanny ambiguities of anxiety and fear, and the forward allusion to the as-yet-formed monster, Bram Stoker's Dracula crawling down his Carpathian castle walls. The two italicised words grate against the Gothic horror of the passage. However, "dainty" shocks in its echoing of the description of the Castle of Bertilak de Hautdesert, in one of its aspects is "piked out off papur", like a *suteltee* or elaborate dinner-time statue carried into the hall as part of an evening's allegorical entertainment. Bertilak is also the Green Man or *wodwose* (half-human creature of the forest) in the anonymous mid-fourteenth-century Middle English alliterative poem, *Syr Gawain and the Knyght of the Grene Chapel*⁸⁶—a place that oddly enough turns up in Honoré de Balzac's short story "Adieu" earlier in the nineteenth century as well; a story about a woman who may or may not be an apparition of someone who endured the horrors of the Napoleonic retreat from Russia. Then the term "lazily", in modifying the verb "crawling", suggests the death-like sleepy creeping of the "green damp" along the outer face of the chateau—the same greenness that marks the Green Chapel in that same strange fourteenth-century poem.

The green slime suggested here is one of the anti-Christian motifs in Jewish polemical writing: the body of Jesus, said in the New Testament narratives to have been taken by angels from the tomb of Joseph of Aramathea, left in a cave where it was buried, and there rotted, so that, from the satirical perspective of Christians worship a green, slimy mess. This satirical alliterative poem was composed in the mid-fourteenth century by a Crypto-Jew on behalf of his fellow Marranos a little more than a generation of the expulsions of the 1290s. Under the

⁸⁵ Dickens, *Dombey & Son*, Volume II, pp. 405-406.

⁸⁶ Norman Simms, *Sir Gawain and the Knight of the Green Chapel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002).

cover of a traditional Arthurian romance, it traces the adventures of a young knight, nephew of the King, who takes the place of all the other Round Table fellows to enter into the game of beheading and renewal, but who does not feel himself worthy at the end for having flinched at the crucial moment of receiving the supposedly fatal blow offered by the Green Knight, and who thus, upon return to Camelot, hides his shame—a nick on the neck, or sign of circumcision and bears on his shield the Pentangle, symbol of his dishonour and betrayal of his Christian oath. His adventure takes place in the period between Christmas Eve, the time of Jesus’s birth and incarnation as the Holy Word and the Feast of the Circumcision, the New Year’s celebrated as a Feast of Fools, when all things are temporarily out of sacred time and profane values turned upside down.⁸⁷

Michael D. Adzema points to a psychohistorical significance in the period between birth and circumcision ritualized into the celebration of the long twelve-day Christmas (which replaced the classical intercalendric period of Saturnalia, a moment out of ordinary time and space, when normal civil and social rules are suspended) between Christmas Eve, when Sir Gawain’s questing ordeal begins, and The Feast of the Circumcision, when he completes the quest and returns to Camelot:

...the fact is that because humans are who we are—characterized by a particular kind of birth process, i.e., traumatic, and related to our distinction of standing upright and thereby decreasing the pelvic opening as well as suffocating the fetus [*sic*] prior to birth—we are destined to through periods of rebirthing purificatory rituals, whether for good or ill. For we are psychologically wedded to reliving that which we could not fully experience at the time because of the overwhelming quality of pain associated with it.⁸⁸

Circumcision, displaced to Gawain’s “nik on the neck” in the third blow of the beheading game, not only marks in the Christian festival the second stage of Jesus’s embodiment of the Word but his inception into the Jewish historical community, the *brit milah* (covenant of the word or sign), which foreshadows and highlights the breaking of his sacred body on the Cross: the promise of Gawain’s submission to the Knight of the Green Chapel’s ritual of

⁸⁷ Dickens articulates, though does not press the connection under the surface of these manifestations of the *topoi* carrying the archaic pains of the pathos-laden post-traumatic stress, when he describes the persons attending an executor’s sale by auction of the recently deceased Mr. Dombey’s household effects, as “herds of vampires, Jew and Christian” (In fact, the locution is repeated twice on the same page), Dickens, *Dombey & Son*, Volume II, p. 478.

⁸⁸ Michael D. Adzema, “The Scenery of Healing,” comment appended to Lloyd deMause, “Restaging Early Traumas” *Journal of Psychohistory* 23:4 (1996) 397.

death and resurrection, a promise, however, not accepted as fulfilled by the Arthurian knight himself, and therefore always felt as a badge of shame, a sign of his inadequacy as an *imitatio christi*. In later times, during the Romantic rebellion against the Enlightenment, novelists tend to see in science, reason and unbridled technology the failure of rationality itself—and hence the phantasmagorical ambiguities of displaying the old images of magic and superstition and the evocation of dread and hysteria as manifestations of the unconscious mind, that is, the return of the repressed.

Another character in Dickens's novel analogous to Sir Gawain within the pathos-laden conceit of the testing ordeal, Mr. Carker, driven to distraction by his fears of retribution from the man he has betrayed, namely, Mr. Dombey, and haunted by his guilt and frustration in the attempt to seduce Edith, and, having crossed the English Channel and returned to “modern” England, mesmerized by the new kind of red-eyed monster in his own age, falls into the path of a speeding locomotive: his body, like his mind—and the jerky flow of narrative which describes his descent into madness—is broken and scattered into the night along the railroad tracks. The intrusion of railways into European life seemed to break apart more than the tranquillity of pre-industrial communities, thrusting rural areas into traumatic collision with each other and urban conglomerates, but to shatter previously unquestioned notions of progressive time, measurable place and the age-old local traditions of personal and social responsibility. The catastrophe is often expressed as a calamitous rebirth of the human race.⁸⁹

Little Nell's Modern Anxiety

I pictured Vaughan on the rock, the foresight of his rifle creeping backwards and forwards in a quarter circle as it followed my movements.⁹⁰

It is unusual to use the verb “to creep” in the sense of a rifle being gently turned in a circle to follow the movements of the target, in this case the narrator who serves as a bait for what is assumed to be some savage beast, perhaps a werewolf, that is preying on villagers and

⁸⁹ Norman Simms, “Fatal Contraptions, Misconceptions and the Painful Pangs of Parturition” *Journal of Literature & Aesthetics* 27:2 (2017) 51-104.

⁹⁰ Geoffrey Household, “Taboo” in van Thal, *The Second Pan Book of Horror Stories*, p. 275.

Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 32, Number 1, 2018

ISSN- 0111-8854

@2018 Mentalities/Mentalités

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

tourists in a mountain wilderness. Instead of a threatening gesture, the narrator takes this careful shifting of aim as a reassurance, some comfort during his highly nervous condition. Instead a sense of disgust or a cringing in response to a menacing presence, the text speaks of a positive reaction, albeit one that is imagined rather than perceived:

I visualized the line of his aim as a thread of light passing down and across in front of my eyes.⁹¹

But as we have indicated, it is not only the sense of a horror tale that enfolds the scene for Nell, and the generic expectations signalled to the first reader of *The Old Curiosity Shop* by Dickens, but aspects to the words, images, gestures and atmosphere generated into the text by more archaic elements of the situation described.

Then on it came again, silent and stealthy as before, and replacing the garments it had taken from the bedside, dropped upon its hands and knees and crawled away. How slowly it seemed to move, now that she could hear but not see it, creeping along the floor! It reached the door at last, and stood upon its feet. The steps creaked beneath its noiseless tread, and it was gone.⁹²

One modern critic of *The Old Curiosity Shop* comments aptly,

The reader's flesh is made to creep well and truly when Quilp kisses Little Nell. "Ah!" said the dwarf, smacking his lips, "what a nice kiss that was – just upon the rosy part." At last, of course, he comes to a violent end.⁹³

From Creeping Things to Dancing Women

*La vampire suçant sa proie n'est pas plus tenace.*⁹⁴

A vampire sucking the blood of its prey is no more tenacious.

Ironically, while the lively and erotic performances at music halls such as Moulin Rouge in the late nineteenth century in Paris seem the very opposite of the creepy crawly motions of villains and the sensation of something unclean and slimy under one's skin in reaction to seeing, touching or thinking about them. Here in our headnote, a teacher of the cancan and other *fin-de-siècle* virtually acrobatic dances pushes her students to the extremes of pain and

⁹¹ Household, "Taboo" p. 275.

⁹² Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 236.

⁹³ Christopher Howse. "Quilp: Charles Dickens Character" *The Telegraph* (2 December 2012) online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/charles-dickens/9036470/Quilp-My-favourite-Charles-Dickens-character>

⁹⁴ Erastène Ramiro, *Cours de danse fin-de-siècle*, eds. Claudine Brecourt-Villars et Jean-Paul Morel in Jane Avril, *Mes Mémoires avec de Erastène Ramiro, Cours de danse fin-de-siècle* (Paris : Phébus, 2005) p. 167.

endurance, their lithe young bodies and ambitious minds stretched beyond the limits where sexuality (*volupté*) and agony (*agonie*) meet.

The body in motion of both humans and animals became an object of great interest in Europe in the final years of the nineteenth century. But it ease not just because photography could make time stand still enough to capture the very essence of bodies in motion, as in the solving of the conundrum of how to visualize horses' legs as they galloped at speed in military battle or in sporting races. There was also the question of new ways to experience one's own anatomy in a world less and less dominated by formalized, class-bound strictures for deportment, and thus how others could visualize the performance of such bodies, new garments to wear, new dances to exhibit the revealed limbs and torso in action, and new values to attach to these private and public events.

On the one hand, as indicated already, these performances and the performers registered a new external freedom of movement, wherein the individual, unchained from many of the traditional constraints and moral values supposedly inherent in the restrictive regulations concerning exhibition and experience, sought to express his or her individuality—spontaneously and instantaneously. On the other, in reaction to the release of deep intimate and unconscious energies suddenly breaking into public notice and personal consciousness, motion could be conceived of outside civilized bounds and institutionalized meanings, whether these activities became frantic, frenetic and fantastic or slowed down to the level of of his novels, *Nicholas Nickleby*:

Some of the craftiest scoundrels that ever walked this earth, or rather—for walking implies at least an erect position and the bearing of a man—that ever crawled and crept through life by its dirtiest and narrowest ways...⁹⁵

Briefly afterwards the narrative points to a hallucinatory experience this same villainous character experiences as he goes down the London streets:

So complete was his abstraction, however, that Ralph [Nickleby], usually as quick-witted as any man, did not observe that he was followed by a shambling figure, which at one time stole behind him with noiseless footsteps, at another crept a few paces before him, and at another glided along by his side—at all times regarding him with an eye so keen and a look so eager and attentive, that it was more like the

⁹⁵ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 601.

expression of an intrusive face in some powerful picture or strongly-marked dream than the scrutiny even of a most interested and anxious observer.⁹⁶

This image of the phantom “creeping round the trunk”⁹⁷ turns out eventually to be not “some strange optical illusion”⁹⁸ but rather to resolve itself into a figure the corrupt Ralph Nickleby recalls from one of the moments in his past when he was at his worst.

Projections of Primary Emotional States of Fear and Panic

In situations in which an individual is panic-stricken or powerless to act, the projective nature of emotions reaches an hallucinatory level. Our acquisition of language involves social conditioning, and we are then not usually sufficiently aware of the projective aspect of our emotions: thus we treat the impressions created by our emotions as if they were external reality. Fairy-tales and myths seem to narrate external events; however, to a greater extent than we realize they are in fact purely pictorial expressions of emotions.⁹⁹

Because these hallucinations and hysterical expressions into ordinary life rise up from deep hurts in our pre-verbal experiences¹⁰⁰—as individuals but also as members of historical communities—what we can discern in Dicken’s novel are archaic passions. Our argument modifies Ludwig Janus’s views in at least two ways: first, because we take the modern novel (from the eighteenth through to the mid-twentieth century) as a form of popular updating of myths and fairy tales; and second, because we see that the novel also consolidates the actual development of the phantasmagoria as a popular entertainment and as a field of internalization of the complex experiences increasingly symbolized by reference to that staged performance of a magic lantern show (from smoke and mirror productions through to photographic tricks and early cinematic spectacles).

Thus, returning to the exemplary passages in *Nicholas Nickleby* we have been examining, we find still more deeply embedded in the projections of his unconscious mind, less than an unawareness of dullness of sensitivity to his own guilty feelings, something interfering with

⁹⁶ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*. P. 605.

⁹⁷ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 605.

⁹⁸ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 606.

⁹⁹ Ludwig Janus, “Comments” appended to Lloyd deMause, “Restaging Early Traumas in War and Social Violence” *Journal of Psychohistory* 23:4 (1996) 392-393.

¹⁰⁰ Janus, “Comments” 392.

his fictional experiences of everyday life. Ralph begins to imagine a presence that truly haunts him, although at this point in the novel it is still referred to as an echoing of Gothic horror and not yet an actual projection of his own mind:

If some tremendous apparition from the world of shadows had suddenly presented itself before him, Ralph Nickelby could not have been more thunderstricken than he was this surprise.¹⁰¹

When finally the plot tightens up like a noose around the older Nickleby's situation and all his friends and allies begin to leave him alone to confront the implications of his evil life, Dicken's narrator indicates that what has been unconscious in the sense of insensible or denied recognition is now turning into a force emerging from the past, not, however, for the old uncle who has betrayed him and his family, but for Nicholas himself, the transformed meaning of the words and the power of the concepts they import into the story:

It was on one of these occasions that a circumstance took place which Nicholas at the time thoroughly believed to be mere delusion of an imagination affected by disease, but which he had afterwards too good reason to know was of real and actual occurrence.¹⁰²

Sentimental as the Dickensian narrative turns out to be, with all its felicitous marriages and fortuitous deaths, its strategic conjunction of meetings and overheard conversations, there is this other metamorphosis at work: the deepening of perceptions into how the personality operates, the influence of lost and repressed memories, and the emergence of lost and distorted feelings (as in Nicholas's and other good characters' memories of past events and how they were originally experienced) and the energizing effects of returned anxieties (as in Ralph's true weakness as a social person and failure as a moral being). Thus matters climax on a dark and gloomy night when Ralph comes to realize the game is up for him and he consolidates in himself the key imagery of a horrible villain and enacts, albeit without wilfully following a script of his own devising:

Creeping from the house and slinking off like a thief groping with his hands when first he got into the street as if he were a blind man, and looking often over his shoulder while he hurried away, as though he were followed in imagination or reality by some one anxious to question or detain, Ralph Nickleby left the City behind him and took the road to his own home.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 758

¹⁰² Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 806.

¹⁰³ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 849.

Then as the description of the physical and emotional atmosphere continues, the metaphoric qualities turn into more psychological markers of the old man's desperate state of mind:

The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds furiously and fast before it. There was one black gloomy mass that seemed to follow him; not hurrying in the wild chase with the others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on....like a shadowy funeral train.¹⁰⁴

After walking through a cemetery in the middle of the night and feeling as though there were ghosts and demons dancing about the gravestones, a delusion out of some phantasmagoric performance that imitates the archaic fears and passions supposedly eliminated by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution of 1789, Ralph suddenly recalls that he had once been on a jury examining the case of a suicide, thus investigating all the details of violent death and the wake of grief and terror left behind for the relatives to suffer, a memory that starts to coalesce into his own self-destructive thoughts and to push forward the shift from sentimental fiction into psychological drama. This comes about through the intrusive noise and bustle of a group of drunken louts who push by him, one of whom seems to be part of a living nightmare:

They were in high good humour, and one of them, a little weasel, hump-backed man, began to dance. He was a grotesque, fantastic figure and the few bystanders laughed.¹⁰⁵

Ralph, too, forces himself to laugh along with them, but not as a social gesture or even as a sign of his own distance from such grotesquery; if anything, a futile attempt to keep away the notion that he is like the fantastic figure of fun—a horrible monster in himself that has lost all power to dominate others. All he seems to have left, as the process of isolation and alienation continues with the desertion of more and more of his toadies and one-time-allies in crime. His seems to be, like that driving Shakespeare's Iago, virtually a motiveless negativity. Inadvertently he repeats gestures made by Newman Noggin, the underling who stays with him until almost the end, not because he feels loyalty towards his boss, but rather because he feels helplessly dependent on Ralph, and therefore, until he is able to escape and ally himself with Nicholas Nickleby and the other forces of goodness that have worked their way into place as a counterforce to greed and corruption, can only mutter imprecations against Ralph and punch the air in frustrated rage:

¹⁰⁴ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 849.

¹⁰⁵ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 850.

He gnashed his teeth and smote the air, and looked wildly round with eyes which gleamed through the darkness, cried aloud, —

“I am trampled down and ruined. The wretch told me true. The night has come. Is there no way to rob them of further triumph, and spurn their mercy and compassion? Is there no devil to help me?”¹⁰⁶

At this point, the terms used to describe lurking but ill-defined, formless phantom-like figures in the darkness¹⁰⁷ or quasi-allegorical descriptors of those forces for good gathering themselves into an opposition to the willing agents of evil and their manifestation in Ralph Nickleby, becomes further clarified as a psychological drama enacted in the disreputable usurer, moneylender and corrupt investment counsellor. It is partly the recollection of the man who had slit in his own throat for some reason no one could fathom. It is partly the actual but fleeting sightings of people from the past whom he had injured by his selfish deeds or who had acted as his agents in the performance of these nefarious plots. It is partly, too, the repressed feelings of guilt he has for most of life refused to acknowledge. However, as now becomes evident, it is himself as he really is revealing himself as the pathetic creature he has always been.

Swiftly there glided again into his brain the figure he had raised that night. It seemed to lie before him, The head was covered now. So it was when he first saw it. The rigid upturned marble feet too, he remembered too.¹⁰⁸

Dickens also uses the verb “to glide” in *Dombey and Son* in various descriptive, metaphorical and psychological ways: thus, in one instance, Mr. Perch is said to have ‘[g]lided from his bracket in the outer office...’¹⁰⁹ in a motion suggesting that he creeps or crawls from one place to another with unctuous ease; in another, in regard to a musical performance by the lugubrious Captain Cuttle, where the player in his own mind shifts from one composition to a second,

By degrees, however, the violoncello, in unison with his own frame of mind, glided melodiously into the Harmonious Blacksmith which he played over and over again...¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 852.

¹⁰⁷ In the so-called Journal Notes of Ezra Jennings, a physician in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*, a ghost or a phantom appears to him “at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the black darkness, and glared and grinned at me” (p. 353).

¹⁰⁸ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 852,

¹⁰⁹ Dickens, *Dombey & Son*, Volume II, p. 454.

¹¹⁰ Dickens, *Dombey & Son*, Volume II, p. 464.

But in this same novel, as the narrative accelerates into its denouement and the reconciliation of differences among the good characters, as the villains and manipulative fools are given their just deserts, Dickens returns to the verb “to creep” to effect the changes in status and mood, e.g.,

With another of those wild cries, she went running out into the room from which she had come; but immediately, in her uncertain mood, returned, and creeping up to Harriet, said...¹¹¹

Even more menacingly, the trope of creeping people who lurk in the shadows of modern society are described by Walter Hartright, the main narrator in Wilkie Collins’ sensationalist¹¹² 1859 novel *The Woman in White*:

Out of the dark byways of villainy and deceit, they had crawled across our path—into the same byways they crawled back secretly and were lost.¹¹³

In an earlier novel, *Basil*, one of Collin’s characters tells how “I felt strange, unutterable sensations creeping over me.”¹¹⁴

Here it is the motion itself that embodies what is dark and dangerous in society. Very soon the creeping figure in Dickens and the embodiment of creepiness in Collins will turn himself into a ghastly manifestation of social evil through a lonely suicide in the garret and become what in other avatars of this *topos* the undying vampiric figure of Dracula or the dried-out and disgusting insect created in Gregor Samsa whose inability to stand up against the deathly conformity imposed by the modern commercial world or against the relentless pressures of bourgeois morals and ambitions imposed by his family.

The modern use of the noun *creep* for a sexual predator does not apply in these instances. Biblical allusion to unclean animals that creep on the ground, such as a snake, without legs or feet, and that swarm like insects and other vermin lie behind the moral taint attached to such creatures. The Hebrew words for such creeping things, *remes* and *sharats* are, however, vague, and the Greek translation *herpeton*, seemingly referring to locusts, as in Acts and

¹¹¹ Dickens, *Dombey & Son*, Volume II, p. 469.

¹¹² So named because the intent was to stimulate sensations similar to those occasioned by goose bumps and creepiness under the skin. In successful novels, however, the sensations serve more than an allegorical or emblematic sense; they help explain the motivations and emotional consequences in the characters created.

¹¹³ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, 1859. (London: the Great Writers Library, 1987), p. 561.

¹¹⁴ Collins, *Basil*, p. 186.

Peter, only confuses matters since the locust is considered by rabbis to be a *kosher* animal. Etymologically, according to the online Wiktionary,¹¹⁵ the English verb *to creep* comes “from Middle English *crepen*, from Old English *crēopan* (“to **creep**, crawl”), from Proto-Germanic **kreupanaq* (“to twist, **creep**”), from Proto-Indo-European **ger-* (“to turn, wind”), that is, to move slowly close to the ground; with the key extension of meaning from the action to the creature that so moves to the feeling in one’s own flesh of such a motion—as though some unclean beast were under one’s skin at the very sight or thought of a disgusting nature. For this reason, we get the modern sense (“he creeps me out”) as we have seen in Wilkie Collins’ *Boris*:

“Don’t tell me that about him any more; my flesh creeps at it!”

The moral repugnance then feeds back into the source of the feeling. But so far as a physical sense of fear and danger, when something “uncanny” happens aboard a ship returning to Europe—in one of Somerset Maugham’s stories of the Federated Malay States, a man becomes mysteriously ill through persistent hiccoughs, tells a story of his native Malay woman left behind who cast a curse on him, and then as the rumours spread that his death is imminent, some shadowy figures perform a “voodoo” ritual sacrifice in the dead of night on the lower deck—the feeling is expressed by the passengers:

A planter in the smoking-room over a gin sling said brutally what most of them felt, though none had confessed.

“Well, if he’s going to peg out,” he said, “I wish he’d hurry up and get it over. It gives me the creeps.”¹¹⁶

Etymological Excursion

“Freud’s theory is about the inherent creepiness of human desire,” he writes. Specifically, Freud elaborated an ineffable quality that he termed the “*unheimlich*”—usually expressed in English as “uncanny.” On Freud’s list of suggested translations, Kotsko also finds “uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy,

¹¹⁵ <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/creep>

¹¹⁶ W. Somerset Maugham, “P. & O.” (1926) in *The Casurina Tree: Seven Stories* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 88. How anachronistic this expression sounds can be shown in *Isles of Despair* by Ion L. Idriess, when one of the Torres Straits islanders remarks to the marooned Scotswoman Barbara Thomson while attempting to explain to her about the spirit world of the local traditions: “These dogai [half-spirit half-human beings] stories always give me the creeps” (p. 146).

dismal, uncanny, ghastly; (of a house) haunted; (of a man) a repulsive fellow.” What Freud was actually talking about, Kotsko thinks, was creepiness.¹¹⁷

Another online source synthesizes several authorities to show this gradual development from description of some beast that creeps and crawls to a mirrored and probably metaphorical sensation in the perceiver’s body:

Oxford English Dictionary (OED) puts it, “To move with the body prone and close to the ground, as a short-legged reptile, an insect, a quadruped moving stealthily, a human being on hands and feet, or in a crouching posture.” This “low and slow” sense, in the 14th century, produced “to creep” meaning “to move stealthily, to sneak,” or “to move or accrete gradually by imperceptible degrees” (as in “creeping socialism”). More importantly for our purposes, the 14th century also saw the development of an intransitive sense of “to creep” applied to one’s skin or flesh meaning “To have a sensation as of things creeping over the skin; to be affected with a nervous shrinking or shiver (as a result of fear, horror, or repugnance)” (OED) (“You make my hair stand on end, and my flesh creep,” Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 1841).¹¹⁸

This same so-called Word Detective points out an earlier Latinate variant on the term:

...the 17th century term “horripilate,” meaning “to have the hair on one’s skin stand up in fear” (a condition caused by contraction of the muscles under the skin and also known as “goosebumps”). “Horripilate” and the noun “horripilation” are derived from the Latin verb “horrere” (to shudder or bristle in fear, connected to our “horror”) plus “pilus,” meaning “hair.”

In another of Somerset Maugham’s stories, “The Force of Circumstance” from *The Casurina Tree*, a young English woman recently married and come to the Malay peninsula where she discovers her husband had not only lived with a Dayak woman for ten years but also fathered three children, the youngest conceived just before he went “home” to find a white woman—any white woman—to marry. “When I see the woman and her children in the village,” Doris tells Guy, “I just feel my legs shaking. Everything in this house; when I think of that bed I slept in gives me goose-flesh...”¹¹⁹ It is, she goes on, “a physical thing, I can’t help it, it’s stronger than I am” and then “it fills me with a physical nausea.” Interestingly, when nearly a half year later Doris decides she must return to England and seek a divorce, the narrator backs off a little from the speech and internal thoughts of the two characters, to describe the morning of her departure in metaphorical terms, seeming to extract the pathetic mood from Guy’s observation of the scene: “The dawn now was creeping along the river mistily, but the night lurked still in the dark trees”.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Nathan Heller, “The Age of Creepiness” *The New Yorker* (9 July 2015) online at <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-age-of-creepiness>. The reference is to Adam Kotsko *Creepiness* (np: Zero Books, 2015).

¹¹⁸ <http://www.word-detective.com/2011/09/the-creeps>

¹¹⁹“The Force of Circumstance,” *The Casurina Tree*, p. 195.

¹²⁰ “The Force of Circumstance,” p. 199

Goosebumps (*la chair de poule* or goose flesh) is the term in French for that sense of creepy horror induced by both physical and psychological disgust, however, without the full range of lexical ambiguity. Rather, *rampant* (from *ramper* = to crawl, creep or glide) suggests cringing, humiliation and servility, yet again lacking in the sense of moral disgust felt moving under the skin.¹²¹ It is more like the simple alliterative coupling of the two verbs without consideration of what is actually depicted: e.g., in an essay by Daphne Du Maurier, she recalls her childish sceptical views of High Anglican self-righteousness.

Matins was dull. But my aunt, who was also my godmother, was a fervent High Anglican, and when I accompanied her to high mass I thoroughly enjoyed it; there was plenty to watch, like going to the theatre. One thing worries me, however, whether at matins or at mass and this was the humble, even obsequious attitude of all the adults to their Maker. "We are miserable sinners...there is no health in us." Why must they cringe and crawl?¹²²

Somewhere behind this seemingly clichéd and meaningless remark, however, there lurks the older, more literal sense of crawling as a manifestation of cringing, an action which belongs more to the viewer than to the active agent in the scene described. The young and healthy Daphne is disgusted by the self-loathing hypocrisy of her aunt and other adults in church.

But also, while the creeping motion of evil and evil's image refracted into the image of its victims, may be taken metaphorically as an indication of nefarious and criminal intentions, the nature of literature and in psychoanalysis as it emerged out of late nineteenth-century insights into hysterical performances at la Salpêtrière in Paris during Charcot's afternoon lectures and in the intimate dialogue between analyst and analysand in Sigmund Freud's Vienna consulting room—is to expose the darker and more archaic aspects of those intentions in the very letters of the descriptive words. Pasqual Cognarde describes the literary personality:

Le littéraire démonte le montage qui est imperceptible au parleur tant que le flux reste sonore, il tronçonne la phrase, il décontextualise les éléments, il multiplie les signes de la ponctuation, il épiluche

¹²¹ Other French terms for the creep, such as *raclé* suggest that the disgusting person scrapes or grates one's skin like a rake (*la raclure*), so that that residue of red and raw material is *raclé* (*les déchets* or *débris* or waste products, dried leaves or flakes of skin), irritating, ugly and dangerous; or *gluant* that the threatening presence of the creep seems like glue, a viscous substance, an unwanted and tenacious person. Nathan Heller's review of Adam Kotsko's book opens with a photograph taken from the film *Saturday Night Fever* of John Travolta hovering over a young woman at a disco: he grasps her chin as he leers at her. The caption identifies this posture assumed by the movie actor as archetypal of the modern sexual predator, that is, a creep.

¹²² Daphne Du Maurier, "Sunday (1976)" in *The Rebecca Notebook and Other Memories* (London: Virago Press, 2004) p. 168.

*les mots de leurs cosses, il trie ces différentes enveloppes, il met à nu les etyma. Tout devient lettres auprès du littéraire. Après qu'il les a dégagées il les mêle comme des fragments d'un puzzle qu'on défait pièce à pièce après avoir saisi l'image. Il s'extrait dès son extraction.*¹²³

The literary person exposes the structure which is imperceptible to the speaker as long as the flow of sound remains audible, he slices apart the phrase, he decontextualizes the elements, he multiplies the punctuation markers, he excises the words out of their shells, he encloses them in different envelopes, he strips it all down to etymological roots. All things become letters next to the literary person. After he has disengaged them, he mixes them like pieces of a puzzle that one undoes after having completed the picture. He extracts them from his extraction.

The expanded version of this etymological sense of the term can be exemplified in Bram Stoker's late nineteenth-century horror-tale *Dracula*:

But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down* with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow; but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and thus by using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall.¹²⁴

Why the narrator chooses to italicise the phrase *face down* out of all the other details in this description of the vampire monster's descent from his chamber high in the castle in the Carpathian Mountains is perhaps a key mystery into what the author is attempting to do in the novel. You would think the contrast between the image of the creature creeping down the wall with his cape spread out like wings and thus seeming to be a bat-like phantom and the final sentence which marks him clearly *as a lizard* was of the essence, unless, of course what Stoker's protagonist imagined is a winged reptile, such as the Southeast Asian *draco volans*. Yet this grotesque picture points not to the vampire bat that flies through the darkness of people's nightmares but to a crawling beast, a phantom in form close to that other disgusting image of Count Dracula resting in his coffin after a night of murder looking like a blood-bloated insect. In this passage, however, the emphasis of the descending creature is on its ability to creep or crawl down the steep wall with his *face down*. But whether the creature creeps down or up (as in Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*), the literary imagery triggers

¹²³ Pascal Quignard (auteur) ; Jean-Luc Vincent (éditeur scientifique) ; Agnès Verlet (éditeur scientifique), *Tous les matins du monde*, texte intégral et dossier (Paris : Gallimard, 2010) p. 34 ; online at <http://www.caam.rice.edu/~yad1/miscellaneous/References/Other/Fr/Tous%20les%20matins%20du%20monde-integrale>.

¹²⁴ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Classics, 1994) p. 30

archaic motions in the mind of human beings who go through the same ordeal of partition, birth, and emergence into a world of confusion and increasingly blurry memories.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, scene v

Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 32, Number 1, 2018

ISSN- 0111-8854

@2018 Mentalities/Mentalités

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 32, Number 1, 2018

ISSN- 0111-8854

@2018 Mentalities/Mentalités

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.