Here Be Monsters: Imperialism, Knowledge and the Limits of Empire

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ABSTRACT

It has become a truism in discussions of Imperialist literature to state that the British empire was, in a very significant way, a textual exercise. Empire was simultaneously created and perpetuated through a proliferation of texts (governmental, legal, educational, scientific, fictional) driven significantly by a desire for what Thomas Richards describes as "one great system of knowledge." The project of assembling this system assumed that all of the "alien" knowledges that it drew upon could be easily assimilated into existing, "universal" (that is, European) epistemological categories. This belief in "one great system" assumed that knowledges from far-flung outposts of empire could, through careful categorization and control, be made to reinforce, rather than threaten, the authority of imperial epistemic rule. But this movement into "new" epistemic as well as physical spaces opened up the disruptive possibility for and encounter with Foucault's "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." In the Imperial Gothic stories discussed here, the space between "knowing all there is to know" and the inherent unknowability of the "Other" is played out through representations of failures of classification and anxieties about the limits of knowledge. These anxieties are articulated through what is arguably one of the most heavily regulated signifiers of scientific progress at the turn of the century: the body. In an age that was preoccupied with bodies as spectacles that signified everything from criminal behaviour, psychological disorder, moral standing and racial categorization, the mutable, unclassifiable body functions as a signifier that mediates between imperial fantasies of control and definition and *fin-de-siècle* anxieties of dissolution and degeneration. In Imperial Gothic fiction these fears appear as a series of complex explorations of the ways in which the gap between the known and the unknown can be charted on and through a monstrous body that moves outside of stable classification.

It has become a truism in discussions of Imperialist literature to note that the British empire was, in a very significant way, a textual exercise. Empire was made real for the bureaucrats who oversaw it, the British public who supported and celebrated it, and the varied people who were subject to it through a seemingly endless variety of texts: colonial reports, maps, travel narratives, political treatises, legal texts, museum exhibits, school books, newspapers and advertisements, and, of course, works of fiction. The *fin de siècle* was, in England, the high-water mark of British Imperialism but this ostensible success was burdened with an awareness of the contradictions at the core of its elaborate discursive constructions. As Alexandra Warwick notes, even as it celebrated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, "the empire was already feeling, in Arnold's words, 'its huge frame not constructed right,' a fact which was to become absolutely clear in the ensuing years of social tension, strikes and unemployment at home and uprisings in the colonies" (203). The gap between the public performances of Imperial power and the contradictory, sometimes precariously structured discourses that shored it up, between certainties of a stable, identifiable English character—more often than not articulated in terms of race and racial purity—and the influence of and potentially contaminating contact with "the subject races," between the belief that one could, in Kipling's terms, "know all there is to know" about colonial spaces and subjects and the awareness of the vast, unknowable, realities of "subaltern epistemologies" (Foucault, "Two Lectures" 81) was a space that enacted the precarious nature of Empire as it was manifest in the texts upon which it was built. These discursive and imagined spaces between purportedly stable narratives of empire, I will argue here, open up a space for the Gothic in popular English *fin de siècle* narratives.

The proliferation of texts that made up Imperialist narratives rendered most of the far-flung outposts of empire at least superficially *known* to the British public. Geography, indigenous life—human, animal, plant—and everything else that was accessible were catalogued by scientists, described by travellers, discussed in public lectures, and incorporated into popular publications. In this sense, almost everything about Imperial holdings was understood to be known. In the opening line of his 1885 story "The Phantom Rickshaw," Rudyard Kipling states that "One of the few advantages that India has over England is a great Knowability" (26). In the discourse of high Imperialism, assumptions of British racial and cultural superiority presumed, and indeed were predicated on, a comprehensive knowledge of and authority over the "East." By the end of the nineteenth century, however, these assumptions were undercut by an increasing awareness of the vast gaps in that knowledge and representations of the East shifted from

being a fantasy of knowability to a space through which other *fin de siècle* anxieties could be imaginatively explored and, perhaps controlled. As Elaine Showalter has suggested, *fin de siècle* "fears . . . fuelled scientific and political interest in establishing clear lines of demarcation between black and white, East and West" (5). The inadequacy of these demarcations are manifest, in part, in what Patrick Brantlinger has called "Imperial Gothic" (227), a genre in which cultural anxieties about the imperial project itself—fears of regression, invasion, degeneration and dissolution—are played out through narratives of encounters between the rational, ruling West and the mysterious, unknowable East. While the physical "blank spaces" on the maps that fuelled the imaginations of early generations of imperialist writers had been filled in by the late nineteenth century, the terrifying, unknowable, unrepresentable blank spaces that shape the Imperial Gothic remained hidden at the borders of Imperial control.

Gothic narratives are preoccupied with transgression, excess, and instabilities. The Gothic articulates unauthorized spaces at the edges—and at the interstices—of stable cultural narratives. As such the Gothic tends to be less about horror, in Ann Radcliffe's sense, than it is about terror: about a pervasive awareness of something not quite right that lurks just as the edges of vision, in moments of silence and in unauthorized or unfamiliar spaces. My interest in Imperial Gothic here is on the ways in which the space between "knowing all there is to know" and the inherent unknowability of the "Other" is played out through representations of failures of classification and anxieties about the limits of knowledge in *fin de siècle* Gothic fiction. These anxieties are articulated through what is arguably one of the most heavily regulated signifiers of scientific progress at the turn of the century: the body. In an age that was preoccupied with bodies as spectacles that signified everything from criminal behaviour, to psychological disorder, to moral standing and to racial categorization, the mutable, unclassifiable body functions as a signifier that mediates between imperial fantasies of control and definition and *fin-de-siècle* anxieties. In Imperial Gothic fiction these fears appear as a series of complex explorations of the ways in which the gap between the known and the unknown can be charted on and through a body moves outside of stable classification. Theorizing the role of bodies in culture, Judith Butler argues that they "are synechdochal for the social system *per se* . . . [and] any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment" (168). What is at the heart of the uncannily illegible signification of the bodies in these fictional works is the inherent instability of the ideology through which that signification is created. The body functions in the texts I discuss here in two ways: as the body of the Other imported into

English spaces (most often as exhibits or specimens housed in museums and private collections), and as the English body that has travelled into colonial outposts. Imperial Gothic texts that focus on the body—whether the body of the colonizing self or the colonized "other"—focus on the permeability and changeability of the body when it is out of place in order to explore anxieties around gaps in the fantasy of comprehensive knowledge that sustained the belief in the imperial project. This system depended on a series of meticulous but inherently incomplete and unreliable systems of classification. My focus is on two classificatory spaces in these texts: the museum as a cultural performance of control and categorization, and the imposition and maintenance of European control through the performance of power in the body of the colonizer. In both cases—when the body of the Other is transported, classified, displayed in the European museum, and when the "self" moves to the unruly spaces of imperial outposts—the narrative that sustains the fantasy of control is revealed to be not only unstable, but itself irrational, impossible and untenable. These exchanges reveal that the fantasy of a comprehensive knowledge of empire is always undermined by the uncontrollable, ultimately unknowable epistemologies that it tries to contain.

ARCHIVING THE EMPIRE

If the imperial preoccupation with textuality has become a truism, so has an understanding of its almost fetishistic relation to acquiring and categorizing knowledge. In the context of nineteenth century imperialism, Foucault's intersecting matrices power/knowledge are manifest in what Thomas Richards has called "the imperial archive." British explorers, botanists and cartographers (among others) collected information and produced seemingly endless texts about their ever-expanding empire. The elaborate networks of accumulated knowledge were "built around knowledge-producing institutions like the British Museum and the Royal Geographical Society, the India Survey, and the universities: [the facts about empire] were thought of as raw knowledge, knowledge awaiting ordering" (Richards 4). The project of assembling the imperial archive assumed that all of the "alien" knowledges that it collected could be easily assimilated into existing, "universal" (that is, European) epistemological categories. This belief in "comprehensive knowledge" assumed that "knowledge was singular and not plural, complete and not partial, global and not local, that all knowledges would ultimately turn out to be concordant in one great system of knowledge" (Richards 7). Local knowledges could thus be made to reinforce, rather than threaten, the authority of imperial epistemic rule.

The imperial archive, then, defined and controlled the relation between knowledges, determined "what can be said" about imperial holdings and the science that sustained them; and regulated the terms through which the knowledge gleaned from these spaces could be disseminated and articulated. Any threat to this regulation of knowledge and enunciability undermines the imagined authority of the archive and of the empire that it stood for.

In spite of the epistemic and political stability that the archive represented, though, the imperial project's movement into "new" spaces opened up the disruptive possibility for the

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> insurrection of subjugated knowledges [which are] . . . the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization . . . but they are also a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (Foucault, "Two Lectures" 81–82)

The contradictions between the enunciation of singularity and the awareness of multiplicity—knowing, paradoxically, all that there is not to know—is the location of terror and horror in Imperial Gothic texts.

Bodies on Display

In what Ruth Hoberman calls "museum Gothic," the gap between what nineteenth century theories of the museum articulated as a "disembodied space" in which visitors "were supposed to be so regulated as to be invisible," and the experiences of "actual museum goers" (3) resonated with other concerns about the unclassifiable and uncontrollable within the ostensibly ordered space of the museum. As Andreas Huyssen has argued, "No matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries" (15). By the end of the nineteenth century, public museums "were inextricably bound up with the nature and practices of imperialism" (Longair and McAleer 1); they were "tools of empire" (MacKenzie 7). As spaces in which objects from far-flung reaches of the empire were collected, catalogued, displayed and written into the master narrative of imperial rule, the excess of meaning imposed by the museum and embodied by these objects becomes a *Gothic* excess and the impossibility of their definitive classification within these "classifying houses" (Hooper-Greenhill 4) renders the regulated space of the museum decidedly uncanny.

There is a strangely easy, but somehow very *un*easy relationship between the Gothic and the Victorian museum. On the one hand, museums are inherently Gothic spaces, filled with objects taken out of context and uncannily frozen in time. Museums embody Gothic preoccupations with the layering of pasts and presents, with unknown histories contained in labyrinthine spaces. But at the same time, those spaces are fundamentally ordered ones in which objects, however uncanny, are contained safely under glass, definitively labelled and categorized and their relations to each other classified and catalogued. In this latter sense—the *making sense* that is the business of the museum—the Gothic seems to have no place at all. But nonetheless there are a significant number of *fin de siècle* stories set in museums and private collections. The intrusion of the irrational, the unclassifiable, and the uncanny into these most rational of spaces plays on and with an underlying anxiety that the elaborate performances of classification and order that the museum enacted in Victorian culture: that the knowledge that these spaces represented might, in fact, not be comprehensive or stable enough to sustain the narrative of British Imperial "progress."

As Richards's "knowledge producing institutions," Victorian museums were deeply implicated in creating, connecting, and perpetuating the projects of empire, science, and modernity. Earlier manifestations of the museum were, according to Tony Bennett, focused on creating surprise and provoking wonder by focusing "on the rare and exceptional, on [displaying] objects for their singular qualities rather than for their typicality; on [display for] sensational rather than rational and pedagogical effect" (2). In contrast, the Victorian museum was a self-consciously rational institution that rejected principles of wonder and resonance in favour of order, classification and clearly defined relation; collecting, displaying and performing the fantasy of "comprehensive knowledge." As Roger Luckhurst notes, the nineteenth century museum was "a modern technology" in which objects were "ordered in transparent taxonomies and aesthetic scientific sequencing" (140). The museum's purpose, according to a report published in the *Hull Daily Mail* in 1889, was "to propagate and popularize knowledge" in the British public. In 1895, George Brown Goode articulated his plan for the improvement of public museums in similar terms. He asserts that museums should be set up "so as to use [natural and cultural artefacts] for the increase of knowledge and for the culture and enlightenment of the people" (qtd. in Bennett 24). But while the terms used by contemporary practitioners and theorists of the museum tended to focus on its altruistic potential for the edification and improvement of the British public, its practice was, not surprisingly, unabashedly political. Objects in museums and collections were, then, arranged in order to demonstrate

unambiguous power not only over the physical artefacts themselves and the cultures from which they were taken, but also over what they were *allowed* to mean, what they were able to communicate, their significance in the "order of things" and how they would shape the understanding and thinking of the public who would be edified by them.

That objects in museums were carefully ordered, then, is obvious. But these were also spaces that were involved in very careful social regulation. Just as the "meanings of objects . . . were inflected and even reinvented by the context in which they were displayed," so too, were the responses of museum goers constructed and regulated (Longair and McAleer 8). Museums were places of "organized walking in which an intended message [was] communicated in the form of a (more or less) directed itinerary" (Bennett 7). In this sense, the ideal enterprise of the museum was ordered—not just the arrangement of the objects in relation to each other—divided and displayed according to categories such as use (household objects, weapons, etc.), material (pottery, bronze, etc.), time period, by culture, geography— but the physical space was used to order to regulate the experience and manipulate the response of the visiting public.

Importantly, for my purposes, a significant element in ordering that response was deployed as a way of creating a popular consensus about the Imperial project. More than simply housing and displaying objects, cultures and people from distant corners of Britain's empire, museums performed tangible control over imperial spaces and alien epistemologies. These were places in which the imperial holdings—and British control over them—were "an eternally present spectacle" (Richards 144). As John M. MacKenzie has argued, "the museum, as much as weaponry, the steam engine, [or] the telegraph . . . represented a tool of empire . . . [It] offered a public justification for expansion and the accommodation of nature and peoples to [the] purposes [of empire]" (7). Gathering artefacts from distant parts of the empire into one place enacted a kind of physical containment of the vast and inconceivably varied objects, creatures and cultures that filled the imperial spaces. This performance of physical control, in turn, enacted a kind of epistemic control which, through careful classification and ordering, made it possible to conceive of the imperial project as part of a continuum of historical progress. Classification, ordering, labelling demonstrated unambiguous power over these objects: power not only over the physical artefacts themselves, but also over what they were allowed to mean. In this sense, as Foucault has argued, the nineteenth century museum could be understood as a heterotopia: what he describes as a "single real place," in which "several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible [are juxtaposed]" ("Other Spaces" 233). So geographies,

cultures, objects and individuals (alive and dead) which would not otherwise ever have been contained in one physical place, are not only accumulated in the museum, their presence in the same space enacts a kind of simultaneity that creates an ordered, rational narrative of "natural" imperial connection. As heterotopias, museums "create a space as perfect, meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled" (Foucault, "Other Spaces" 8).

While nineteenth century curators and trustees dreamed of the "perfect museum," they were "shadowed by ghosts of disappointment" (Siegel 3). As Jonah Siegel notes, "objects do not generally speak for themselves, and even when they appear to do so they do not necessarily say what their collectors intended" (8). In this sense, all, or at least most, objects in a museum are haunted—if not in the spectral sense of being connected with spirits or ghosts—in the truer sense of being doubled. That is, the objects carry with them the awareness, always, of their previous existence as, for example, household objects in everyday use, or, in the case of specimens and mummies, of creatures or people who lived and who were not objects but subjects. Michael Baxandall has outlined three distinct terms that he argues are at play in the field of exhibitions: "makers of objects, exhibitors of made objects, and viewers of exhibited made objects" (36). I would argue, though, in light of the haunted nature of the artefact, that there is a fourth term at play here, one that throws the uncanny nature of the relations between objects, the setting of the museum and the acts of interpretation that resonate between the object and its viewer into sharp relief: the meaning that is made by the object itself. This is particularly true in Imperial Gothic stories, in which the gap between what the "maker of the object" knew, what the "exhibitors of . . . objects" can know, and the instability and fundamentally incomplete nature of the narrative that they transmit to the viewer of the object, drives the terror of the plots. The desperate rationality of the museum collapses into the disorder of the "other" knowledges barely contained in its exhibits. As a space that enacts the desire for comprehensive knowledge that Richards suggests drove the mania for collecting, ordering, and displaying objects in the service of the imperial project, the museum is a space where English bodies and colonial objects[1] participate in the tensions between the ideals of the relation between the domestication and familiarization of the far-flung outposts

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[1] This mania for collecting, ordering and displaying included human cultures and subjects and there were a large number of "ethnographic displays" and "human zoos" throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. This highly problematic performance of imperial control did not make its way into Gothic or horror fiction, and so is not part of my discussion here.

of empire, and the dizzying unknowable difference and individuality that these objects represent.

The possibility of unauthorized exchanges of meaning between the object and the viewer reconfigures not only the ostensible stability of the "maker, exhibitor, viewer" relation, it also exposes the gaps at the centre of the fetishized narrative of comprehensive knowledge that, for Richards and others, was at the core of the imperial project. In almost all of these stories, unsettling gaps in what is known or understood about an artefact are reinforced through representations of fractured, incomplete or dismembered collections.

Interestingly, the unstable bodies that are at the centre of these texts are, more often than not, dismembered and fragmented. The body dismembered in the name of science, commerce or greed is perhaps the most Gothic representation of Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject. The hands and feet that litter these stories are not abjected by their original possessors themselves, it is their reclassification as *objects* which renders them abject in the eyes of the collector and scientist. But, like Kristeva's articulation of this concept, they "disturb identity, system [and] order." They are "in-between, ambiguous" (Pearce 66). Part of that ambiguity is that they are almost inevitably re-membered by "conjuring up their previous context": through reanimation and the appearances of ghostly apparitions.

Perhaps the most interesting of these narratives of dismemberment is Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Brown Hand" (1899). Doyle's story articulates profound anxieties about Western scientific practices and about the invasion of familiar English spaces by the body of the Other. The story takes place in the home of a retired Anglo-Indian surgeon, who is described as "the most distinguished Indian surgeon of his day" (43). His credentials thus established, the story goes on to note that he and his wife have become the victims of a series of ghostly visitations. Sir Dominick, the surgeon, calls upon his nephew, a man of science who had "devoted a great deal of attention to abnormal psychical experiences" (47) for help. Sir Dominick's house is located in rural England, in an area that the narrator notes at length is marked by English history and signs of long-term Anglo-Saxon occupancy. At the centre of this country house in the centre of England is an anatomical collection. One wall of the room is lined with shelves filled with "glass jars containing pathological and anatomical specimens: . . . bloated organs, gaping cysts, distorted bones, odious parasites—a singular exhibition of the products of India" (49). The collection is, itself, described as fragmented: the "greater part," Sir Dominick tells us, was destroyed in a house fire in Bombay. The room is haunted by the ghost

of a man whose hand Sir Dominick amputated in India many years before. The hand, we are told, became part of the collection in lieu of a medical fee. In spite of the "Hill man's" protest that "according to his religion it was an all-important matter that the body should be reunited after death . . . the belief is, of course an old one, and the mummies of the Egyptians arose from an analogous superstition" (53). The initial relation between the British subject and the Other's body as object here is predicated on commercial exchange and on an intellectualized dismissal of the patient's own way of knowing. As in the many stories of mummies whose bodies and body parts are bartered, damaged and lost, Sir Dominick's equally cavalier preservation of the body parts of more contemporary imperial subjects through modern scientific method results in the return of the repressed and on the "object" of scientific study's insistence on being recognized in his own terms.

In order to solve the mystery of the haunting, the nephew agrees to spend the night in the laboratory, asserting, "I have no pretence to greater physical courage than my neighbours, but familiarity with a subject robs it of those vague and undefined terrors which are the most appalling to the imaginative mind" (50). Asserting the preeminence of rational, western knowledge over more primitive fears, his first glimpse of the ghost comes dangerously close to disrupting his rational certainty:

> with a thrill which all my scientific absorption could not entirely prevent, [I saw] that something was moving slowly along the line of the wall. . . . I dimly discerned a human figure . . . his eyes cast upwards towards the line of bottles which contained those gruesome remnants of humanity. He seemed to examine each jar with attention, then pass on to the next. When he came to the end of the line he stopped, faced me, threw up his hands in a gesture of despair, and vanished from my sight. I have said that he threw up his hands, I should have said his arms, for. . . . He had only one hand! As the sleeves drooped from the upflung arms I saw the left plainly but the right ended in a knobby and unsightly stump. (52)

The handless ghost insists on being re-membered . . . in both senses. His story must be told, his beliefs recognized and his rituals respected. His ghostly presence insists that he becomes more than the object of scientific inquiry or exchange.

The solution to the mystery of the ghost's presence is reached though, through a blend of rational, scientific means and the "occult" knowledges that order the ghost's actions. Doyle's protagonist "consults an authority . . . on earth bound spirits" and the ghost's position as undifferentiated object of imperial intervention continues, even in the story's final exchange:

as the title of Doyle's story suggests, any "brown hand" will do to appease the ghost. While the ghost violently rejects the first replacement hand that he is offered, it is not because he recognizes that it is not his own, but because it is a *left* hand; and it was his right hand that was amputated and kept in the collection. The next night, he accepts the specimen jar containing a right hand—another person's right hand—and leaves forever.

This cavalier attitude that constructs the body of the Other as undifferentiated, commodified object continues in a number of stories, most significantly, in stories that focus on the reanimated mummy.[2] The mummy's presence in Imperial Gothic stories draws attention to a disturbing gap in the turn-of-the-century knowledge systems that sustained the imperial project. While its body may be owned, placed on display or dissected, it is ultimately the most uncanny of objects: familiar and alien, natural and supremely unnatural.

In H. Rider Haggard's "Smith and the Pharaohs" (1912), a similar preoccupation with a dismembered hand reveals the inadequacy of western knowledge and the unsettling limits of imperial power. Smith, an amateur archeologist, has fallen in love with the mask of a beautiful Ancient Egyptian queen. Nothing is known about the "Queen of the Mask" until Smith, after spending years searching for her tomb, finds it and with it a "mummied hand, broken off at the wrist" (151), a broken statue with a barely legible cartouche that identifies her as "Queen Ma-Mei," and a basket of artefacts that he does not describe because, we are told, they can be seen

> in the gold room of the Museum, labelled "Bijouterie de la Reine Ma-Mei . . . Thebes." It may be mentioned that the set is incomplete. For instance, there is but one of the great gold ceremonial earrings . . . and the most beautiful of necklaces has been torn in two—half of it was missing. (151)

In this and other stories,[3] fragments—partial sets, broken objects, incomplete texts and dismembered bodies—draw the focus not to the objects that are labelled in the gold rooms of Museum, but to the parts that have eluded that classification and containment: the "phantom limbs" that haunt the ideal of comprehensive knowledge.

Beyond this emphasis on fragmentation and dismemberment, though, both "Smith and the Pharaohs" and "The Ring of Thoth" (1890), another

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[2] I have discussed the relationship between reanimated mummies and their disruptive potential to western epistemic systems at length in "Mummy Knows Best: Knowledge and the Unknowable in Turn of the Century Mummy Fiction," *Horror Studies* 1.1 (2010): 5–24.

[3] See, for example, H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1886), Bram Stoker's *Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903, 1906), and Théophile Gautier's "The Mummy's Foot" (1910).

story by Conan Doyle, focus on unregulated movements within museums themselves. In these stories, unauthorized, unregulated movement in a museum further disturbs the illusion of the order and classification that consolidates the performance of power in the Imperial Archive. After turning over most of the artefacts he found in Ma-Mei's tomb to the Museum in Cairo, Smith finds himself locked in and he is confronted with the ghosts of a group of Egyptian Pharaohs whose speeches reinforce both the limits of western knowledge and of empires. Both Smith and the protagonist from Doyle's story, John Vansittart Smith—who gets locked into the Louvre—act out a Gothic inversion of the prescribed relation between visitors and the physical space of the museum: theirs is a very *dis*organized walking. They wander randomly through the collections after hours, looking behind curtains, losing their way, and peeping into rooms. In these stories, the protagonists, who are both respected Men of Science, are confronted with the inadequacy of their knowledge. In Doyle's story, Vansittart Smith is a preeminent Egyptologist whose research "promised to throw the light upon the first germs of human civilization and the origin of the greater part of our arts and sciences" (203). Yet after hours, in the unregulated time in the heart of the "knowledge producing institution," the museumified objects insist on their own meanings and relations outside of those imposed on them by western epistemic systems. Smith has encountered a porter at the Louvre whose face "was indeed the very face with which his studies made him familiar" (204). There follows a long, detailed description of that face, itemizing the skin "over the temple and cheekbone [that] was as glazed and as shiny as varnished parchment" and the "strange dark eyes" that were "vitreous, with a misty dry shininess, such as [Vansittart] Smith had never seen in a human head before" (205). The porter is at once described as a known, knowable object but also somehow beyond Smith's expertise. Significantly, unlike other objects, the porter's gaze immediately turns on Smith, who, looking into those "strange eyes . . . saw some strong emotion gather in their depths, which rose and deepened until it broke into a look of something akin to both horror and hatred." The encounter disturbs Vansittart Smith so much that "his thoughts refused to return into their natural groove. They would run upon the enigmatic attendant with the sphinx-like face and the parchment skin" (206). The attendant, it turns out, is a powerful priest from Ancient Egypt who discovered an elixir which made him immortal. Indeed, as Smith discovers after he is locked in the Louvre overnight, the mysterious priest knows things that even the most eminent Egyptologists do not and cannot know. His knowledge of the artefacts in the museum's glass cases is disconcertingly "other" than that of the "experts" who placed them there. As Smith watches, the priest rummages through the display cases, moving

all of the objects he comes in contact with out of their place in the order of the museum. He names the unnamed mummy in the display and finds a secret in an unlabelled piece of jewelry. He unwraps a mummy that "had never been unswathed before" (209) and ransacks a case containing a "magnificent collection of early Egyptian rings and stones" (210) in which he finds, unlabelled and unknown to the curators of the museum, the Ring of Thoth in which is hidden the antidote to the potion that made him immortal. More significantly, though, he turns his analytical gaze onto the English expert and derides his knowledge of Egyptology, saying:

> "Your knowledge of the subject is contemptible. The whole keystone of our old life in Egypt was not the inscriptions or monuments of which you make so much, but was our hermetic philosophy and mystic knowledge of which you say little or nothing." (211)

The priest's words, uttered in the heart of this "tool of empire," are disruptive and terrifying. While the *fin de siècle* British museum—as an institution, as a centre of knowledge and power, and as a physical space—is founded on principles of rationality, order, and classification, the objects that it houses, as the figures in these stories suggest, are not always so easily contained by these terms nor subject to its power. Objects are able to evoke responses beyond those dictated by the labels and context of an exhibition: they can evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which they came: they resonate, they evoke wonder. These resonances move the viewer's relation to an artefact beyond the explanatory texts that surround it and point to limits of museumified containment, illuminating instead the gaps and tensions between what is visible and what is invisible, what is displayed and what is kept hidden, what is known and what is not known. As MacKenzie notes, the reading of objects in museum exhibitions changes with the gaze of the visitor and so, he concludes in decidedly Gothic terms, "supposedly 'dead' objects speak back and speak often" (12).

Objects that move into English epistemic and physical space bring with them, as these and other Imperial Gothic stories show, a kind of uncanny, disturbing sense of the unruly context from which they came. Their histories, their uses, their fundamental difference belie the systems of categorization, control and knowledge into which the museum, and the other technologies of epistemic control, attempt to place them. The unruliness of the objects reflects a disturbing awareness of the *un*knowability of imperial spaces. Just as the body of the priest in "The Ring of Thoth" refuses to be read as a singular, recognizable text, so the spaces into which the

imperial project moves its "civilizing mission" refuse to adhere to the careful script of imperial definition and control. Bodies, whether the body of the "Other" or the body of the English "Self," are represented in these texts as decidedly unstable in the face of imperial narratives.

CONTAMINATED BODIES

The imperial project's emphasis on obtaining and categorizing knowledge was also inscribed as a fundamentally civilizing one. "England," John Ruskin says in 1873, "must guide human arts, and gather the divine knowledge, of distant nations, [who must be] transformed from savageness to manhood, and redeemed from despairing into peace'" (278). The belief in the transformative influence of European civilization on colonized peoples functions in many ways like Mesmer's notion of animal magnetism which is, he says, "a fluid, universally diffused medium . . . of mutual influence . . . communicated from one body to other bodies" (qtd. in Haddock 354). While I do not want to take this particular connection too far, Mesmer's very popular notion of the "communication" of a "fluid, universally diffused medium" can work as a metaphor for the representation of European influence in imperialist texts and allows us to think about the problematics of the imperial project and the ways that its ideological investment in its "influence" is represented as a troubled, troubling project in the Gothic texts of empire. The body that moves between centre and margins, the body that is infused with authority and a stable, "superior" identity, becomes—in these stories—an uncanny and destabilized object that mediates between the rigorously defined definitions of colonizing Self and colonized Other. The paradoxes at the heart of imperialist discourses of race, science, and the "good work" of spreading civilization are exposed and explored through the representation of the transforming, unstable bodies in the contact zones of empire.

In the text of Empire, and the texts that perpetuated the fantasy of imperial rule, race functioned as one of the primary markers for the European, and particularly the British, right to govern. As Cecil Rhodes contends in 1877, the English made up "the finest race in the world and . . . the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race. [We are] the best, the most human, most honourable race the world possesses" (278). English characters in stories like Kipling's "The Mark of the Beast" (1890) and "The Return of Imray" (1891) belie the ideological machinery of these narratives that conflated stable definitions and articulations of race with unquestionable power and control. The ultimately unstable, illegible bodies of the protagonists in these works create a textual space

that mediates *between* the certainties of oppositional definitions. That is, the permeability of the borders of the transformed, contaminated English body signals an unsettling instability in definitive categories of Self and Other, creating what Balachandra Rajan calls "unlawful matches and divorces of things" (148).

So in spite—or perhaps because of—the public arguments about British racial and cultural superiority made by Rhodes, Ruskin and the rest, the Gothic double of this discourse of European influence is, in Mesmer's terms, an unstable influence that has the potential to move *both ways* between permeable bodies. Imperial Gothic stories explore the fact that the very things that make the spreading of "civilization" possible create the potential for its reversal. This is the horror that is recognized in the Gothic: the ways in which the idea of the influence that one culture can have on another through prolonged and intimate contact could result not in the elevation of the "savage" to "manhood," but in the degeneration of "man" to "savage" or worse. In these texts it is not only the English *body* that is unstable but, more horrifically, it is the racial and cultural positions that that body *signifies* that become unmoored from their ideological apparatus.

In Rudyard Kipling's "The Mark of the Beast," it seems possible that knowledge—and therefore power—can be obtained through long acquaintance, through study and through controlling and cataloguing narratives. Strickland, who is a recurring protagonist in many of Kipling's Gothic stories, "knows as much about natives of India as is good for any man" ("Mark" 293). As the English authority, he collects native stories, "goes among" the people, and learns the "nature of the Oriental." His position as "expert" on "native life" allows him to both solve the mysteries afflicting the less well-versed characters in the stories and ultimately reveal the limitations of even *his* knowledge. Indeed, knowing "as much as is good for any man" leaves Strickland in the precarious space between native and English epistemologies. Strickland's authority as a police officer is based on his comprehensive knowledge of the "native" mind, language and customs. In contrast, Strickland's friend, Fleete, is supremely ignorant of all things native: "[His] knowledge of natives was, of course, limited and he complained of the difficulties of the language" (293). "The Mark of the Beast" is the story of Fleete's drunken desecration of a statue of Hanuman in a local temple. He is cursed by a faceless silver leper and the curse is manifest in a terrifying physical transformation from human to animal.

Fleete's transformation is articulated along three intersecting trajectories: first, he shifts from the familiar to the uncanny in his movements and comments. Second, he loses his connection with the anglicized spaces in his Indian context and moves toward a problematic affinity for the

indigenous: the well-bred Anglo-Indian horses, for example, are terrified of him, but the indigenous wildlife in the hills embraces him. Finally, he loses his power of speech, something that ultimately contaminates the rest of the narrative, which almost immediately becomes riddled with silences and omissions. Fleete's degeneration is "beyond any human and rational experience" (301) and his descent into monstrosity contaminates his friends, drawing them into the realm of the barbaric and the unspeakable and ultimately even moving them beyond the racial and cultural definitions of Englishness. The scene in which the "Silver Man" is captured by a group of Fleete's friends and horrifically tortured in order to "cure" Fleete is ultimately unrepresentable in the western text: the events are "beyond description," and "cannot be put down here" (304). The excess of horror implodes the text here, collapsing it into itself until nothing can be said, nothing can be asserted with authority or classified with certainty. As Peter Morey argues, these elisions are necessary for the survival of European epistemologies because "to tell the story . . . is to reintegrate irrational events into the rational, linear, narrative valued by the West [used to] frame, represent and govern the East" (210). The narrator describes the group as having "disgraced ourselves as Englishmen forever" (306). In both of these cases the contaminated, transformed Englishman poses a threat beyond the limits of his body: this is not so much *individual* identity that is threatened but the coherent, *collective* identity that sustains the Imperial project.

In another of Kipling's stories, "The Return of Imray" (1891), the protagonist mysteriously disappears and his bungalow is rented out to Strickland of the Police. The bungalow plays a central role in this story: the narrator explains that

> unless you know how Indian bungalows were built you would never have suspected that above the cloth lay the dark three-cornered cavern of the roof, where the beams and the underside of the thatch harboured all manner of rats, bats, ants, and foul things. (17)

The space between the ceiling cloth and the roof is a mysterious, inaccessible space within a space: a physical manifestation of the uncanny within the familiar, "neat," "desirable" bungalow. Left alone in the house while Strickland attends to his duties, the narrator feels "that someone wanted me very urgently . . . but his voice was no more than a husky whisper" (18) and eventually elects to spend his days on the veranda because the bungalow "was much too fully occupied by a tenant with whom I did not wish to interfere" (19). As the story progresses, this uneasiness

becomes a more pronounced fear of the unexplored spaces within the ostensibly controlled, defined domestic spaces of empire.

Eventually, it is revealed that Imray has been murdered by his domestic servant and that his body has been stashed in the rafters above the ceiling cloth "which looked as neat as a whitewashed ceiling" (17). The motive for the murder, Strickland discovers, is Imray's ignorance of "the nature of the Oriental" (24). He laid his hands on the head of the servant's young son who died of fever shortly afterwards. Bahadur Khan, the servant, justifies his actions by saying, "My child was bewitched and I slew the wizard" (24). The gap between epistemologies, like the gap between room and roof, is the space in which the central action of the story takes place. The body of the Englishman is not only endangered in this space, it is transformed completely: Imray is not only murdered, he has become a ghost—insubstantial and speechless, "the thing under the tablecloth" (24). The transformation from Englishman to "thing" reverberates in the gap between the two versions of the event: on the one hand, the scientific, microbial diagnosis of the cause of the child's death; on the other, Bahadur Khan's supernatural explanation. Imray's incorporeal presence in the bungalow testifies to the existence of a kind of knowledge beyond the explanations of European science, while the discovery of his corpse simultaneously restores, imperfectly, the power of the rational. In both of Kipling's stories the paradox of the relation between power and knowledge lies in the ways in which knowledge, while necessary to rule, invades and fundamentally changes the British "self," "the acquisition of knowledge can effect a kind of assimilation; it puts separation, and therefore power, at risk" (Kerr 235).

Fears of degeneration are connected with fears of contamination in these stories. The transformation of the English body challenges narratives of racial purity and the "natural" right of English rule. In Sax Rohmer's novel, *The Green Eyes of Bâst* (1920),[4] this degenerative contamination is manifest in the transforming body of the daughter of an English lord. The dismissal or ignorance of Native systems of knowledge precipitates the English characters' transformation into the unclassifiable manifestation of Gothic instabilities. The monstrous result of their actions foregrounds the fear of contamination that shapes both of these stories; a contamination that, significantly, infects all of the characters around the contaminated figure. In the "Mark of the Beast," the "cure" for the transformation of

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[4] While Rohmer's novel was published after the end of World War One (and so after the end of the long nineteenth century), it can be argued that Rohmer continues the fantasy of imperial control, and the paranoia of invasion scare narratives (in novels like his *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* [1913]), unchanged from its turn of the century predecessors, into the early part of the twentieth century.

the English body results in an unrepresentable degeneration not only for Fleete, but for his companions as well. In *The Green Eyes of Bâst*, the child of empire is a nightmarish blend of beliefs, histories and zoological classifications for whom there is no "cure" except death.

Like Fleete, Nahemah, the monstrous half-cat, half-woman in *The Green Eyes of Bâst*, threatens the integrity of English society and its core of racial purity. Rohmer explores the implications of blending the knowledges of East and West, of ancient Empire and contemporary Empire by imagining what their offspring would look like. Nahemah mediates between the discourses she inhabits, drawing each of them to their Gothic conclusion. The result is a destructive force that is both physically distant from, yet irrefutably connected to, the centre of Imperial control. She is not simply an animal/human hybrid but a complex blend of cultures and cultural texts. Greefe, the doctor whose life's work has been focused on classifying all types of hybridity, and who studies Nahemah closely, notes that she matured "and had (by day) the eyes of an Oriental" and describes her having "the features of a perfect *Ancient Egyptian regularity. . . .* At the age of twelve she was tall, [and] slender, beautifully formed and with a natural elegance and taste which came from the Coverly stock" (278), and, of course, during the festivals of Bâst, she is more predatory cat than human. Nahemah terrifyingly embodies self and other, past empire and present, animal and aristocrat; an illegible blend of categories, textual references, supernatural beliefs, and scientific certainties. She is Rajan's "unlawful match and divorce of things" (148).

These figures add a potent ideological layer to Kelly Hurley's argument about the "abhuman," those "human bodies," she says, "that have lost their claim to a discrete and integral identity . . . bodies that occupy a threshold between two terms of an opposition" (190). As exceeding classification, these figures occupy the threshold, signified by Hurley and others with a slash (human/animal) and that intersecting position becomes the location for an exploration of the troubling cracks that appear in the officially seamless face of the ideology of high Imperialism. In this sense, the blending signals not a hyphenation but a horrific permeability.

Throughout *The Green Eyes of Bâst*, for example, the focus is on individual spaces and bodies that are unclassified and unclassifiable. The novel begins with a description of Sir Marcus Coverly's corpse whose "horribly contorted features presented a kind of mottled green appearance utterly indescribable" (20), and moves through the repeated descriptions of Dr. Greefe as an uncanny blend of figures from Ancient Egyptian mythology, racial and cultural categories. These depictions of "uncanny" bodies culminate in the literally shifting, unspeakable body of Nahemah:

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> Vaguely defined as if in smoke I could perceive the body of the creature to which [the two huge green eyes] belonged. It was slender and sinuous and sometimes I thought it to be that of a human being and sometimes that of an animal. For at one moment it possessed the lines of a woman's form and in the next, with those terrible eyes regarding me from low down upon the ground, it assumed the shape of a crouching beast of prey. (119)

Nahemah's body is, to use Hurley's terms, "fluctuating, admixed and abominable" (195); like Fleete, it is unintelligible in the terms of any single definitive categorization. As a text, it is illegible.

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For Fleete and Nahemah the instability of the European body is significantly one that is articulated in terms of going from human to animal. This differentiates the Gothic and monstrous representations from other Imperialist texts in which the kind of atavism that Patrick Brantlinger describes in his discussion of Imperial Gothic is located in a fear of "going Native" (230). This shift away from humanity is, again, part of the anxieties at the core of imperial discourse played out to their Gothic extreme. If one believed Rhodes's insistence that the English are the "most human" then the move to—and beyond—the animal in these texts places the characters outside of the farthest limits of recognizable humanity and into horrific moments of uncanny indigenization. Fleete's and Nahemah's transformation alienates them not only from English culture but from all human cultures—from humanity itself on the most fundamental of levels.

Possessing the body of the east or being possessed by it, the terror in these stories comes from the knowledge that the body is not inviolable. It is, as Abercrombie Smith's map of human anatomy in Conan Doyle's "Lot No. 249" suggests, able, like imperial spaces themselves, to be annexed, invaded, and transformed. More terrifying still, the objects of British imperial knowledge are possessed of their own knowledges which demonstrate, as Brantlinger points out, "that Western rationality may be subverted by the very superstitions it rejects" (184). The narrator of Kipling's stories concludes that his tales, like the beliefs of the characters in them, will not be believed

> in the first place because [they are] unpleasant and, in the second, because it is well known to every right-minded man that the gods of the heathen are stone and brass, and any attempt to deal with them otherwise is justly condemned. ("Mark" 307)

Articulating Imperialist anxieties about the limits of knowledge through unstable, fluctuating bodies in these texts reveals a site of mediation that allows for an exploration of the complexities of both imperialist master narratives and the figures who act as uncanny mediators between colonizer and colonized. For the writers of Imperial Gothic, the red map of empire has written across it in bold, but almost invisible letters, "here be monsters."

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