

Exorcising the Past: History, Hauntings and Evil in Neo-Gothic Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis explores the conventions of both historical and Gothic fiction in order to investigate what seems to be a recurrent impulse to exorcise the past in what I define as contemporary Neo-Gothic fiction. It therefore attempts to establish a distinction between Neo-Gothic fiction and other forms of contemporary Gothic fiction by focusing on the treatment of history, the supernatural and the grand narrative of progress in three contemporary Gothic novels: *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters, *The Historian* by Elizabeth Kostova and *The Accursed* by Joyce Carol Oates. This thesis argues that the most potent manifestation of history can be found in the representation of the revenant in Neo-Gothic fiction, which exhibits a disruptive and evil ontology that problematises the exorcism of the past. Furthermore, the reactions of ‘modern’ characters to these revenants illustrate the imperative to exorcise the past, and therefore the treatment of history and the past is reflected in the interaction between the ‘modern’ characters and the Gothic revenants. Through this interaction as well as the parody of traditional Gothic and historical fiction conventions, Neo-Gothic fiction constructs a critique of the Enlightenment’s grand narrative of progress. Paradoxically, this constitutes Neo-Gothic fiction’s own attempt to exorcise the past, which it recognises in a simplified and reductive narrative of history propounded through the grand narrative of progress. This thesis therefore pays particular attention to the configuration of revenants as evil and ‘modern’ humans as good, and the disruption of this simple binary that is effected through Neo-Gothic fiction’s subversion of the grand narrative of progress. This focus allows for the theorisation of the revenant through Jacques Derrida’s notion of ‘hauntology’ and Julia Kristeva’s ‘the abject’, the investigation of the treatment of history in Neo-Gothic fiction and the exploration of very recent Gothic texts that have not yet received much critical attention.

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Introduction

What exactly is the difference from one century to the next? Is it the difference between a past world – for which the specter represented a coming threat – and a present world, today, where the specter would represent a threat that some would like to believe is past and whose return it would be necessary again, once again in the future, to conjure away?

- Jacques Derrida, *The Specters of Marx*

If, as Michel de Certeau suggests, the historian has been given the task of exorcising the Other in history (227), then the Neo-Gothic author has adopted the duty of its resurrection. Exorcising the past for the good of the future is a long-standing theme in human history. The notion of progress as the natural course of the universe is mirrored in the predominant concept of time as a line that stretches from one point to another and usually entails a belief in moving from a primitive or primal state to a more developed, civilised state. It is a notion that has characterised European and North American societies in particular, influenced as they are by Enlightenment beliefs in the capacity for human perfection. During the Enlightenment, as Peter Osborne notes, periods came to be considered not just as the latest divisions in a temporal sequence, but as “a qualitative transcendence of the past” that was reoriented toward a better future (11). This would come to constitute the grand narrative of progress that conceptualised time as a process moving from bad to good, primitive to civilised, barbaric to humane. Gothic fiction was but one of the many artistic forms in which this reorientation toward a better future came to be represented. Contrary to popular understanding, ‘original’ Gothic texts represented fantastic, supernatural villains and occurrences not as subversive ruptures to the eighteenth-century status quo, but in order to exorcise them in the name of ‘modern’, reasonable approaches to the world. As Catherine Spooner suggests, “in Gothic texts [...], the past is a site of terror, of an injustice that must be resolved, an evil that must be exorcised [...]. The past chokes the present, prevents progress and the march towards personal or social enlightenment” (*Contemporary Gothic*, 18–19). Similarly, historical fiction represented a diachronic view of the past by portraying historical settings with an eye to the issues and milieu of the author’s present, and delivered commentary based on the differentiation between the two temporal points. While these genres have evolved since their first offerings in the late eighteenth century, the impetus to exorcise the past through its textual representation, whether in fantastical fiction or historiographic narratives, remains.

This thesis aims to investigate how that impetus to exorcise the past is represented in contemporary Gothic fiction. The proliferation of ‘the Gothic’ as a critical concept is well-documented in the late twentieth-century boom in Gothic studies (Punter and Byron xvii). While the study of Gothic writing is not exactly new, it is only in the early twentieth century that serious large-scale academic studies of the Gothic have been attempted (Smith, *Gothic Literature* 5). Following this renewed interest, the term ‘Gothic’ experienced such a proliferation in application that Fred Botting suggests that, “[i]n the twentieth century Gothic is everywhere and nowhere” (*Gothic* 101). While scholars rightly caution against too broad an application of the term, the Gothic has never been as unstable as it is now, when it is applied to things as diverse as high-end fashion on the one hand, and American talk shows like *Jerry Springer* on the other (Warwick, “Feeling Gothicky?” 12). In light of this proliferation, less critical attention is being focused on Gothic fiction. Most extended discussions end at the turn of the millennium, and newer fiction especially has received very little critical attention, except in attempts to redefine the Gothic in its new diffused state. For this reason, I have limited the parameters of my research to current Gothic fiction – prose published in the last ten years – that portrays overtly supernatural¹ events in historical settings. In other words, this thesis examines novels published in the twenty-first century that deliberately mimic ‘original’ Gothic novels by employing a mix of generic conventions in order to represent the ways in which history haunts our pasts, presents, and futures. However, these texts do not only consciously revive old generic structures in order to recapture something of the ‘original’ Gothic tradition, but also use these conventions to turn a critical eye on the central binary that informs Gothic fiction and its development over the centuries: the primitive and the civilised. They are then not merely concerned with psychological issues, internal fears and contemporary terrors, but create narratives that use history as a platform for the interrogation of human development. This thesis thus aims to establish a distinction between ‘Neo-Gothic fiction’ and other forms of contemporary Gothic fiction that do not exhibit the same overriding concern with history.

It must be noted that Neo-Gothic fiction relates to history in two senses. As a popular genre, Neo-Gothic fiction’s use of history, on the simplest level, can be related to the recent ‘boom’ in ‘history’ as a product for popular consumption. In his text *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, Jerome de Groot asserts that,

¹ To be clear, ‘supernatural events’ pertains to events that can be described as ‘unnatural’ in a realistic context. These texts are thus to be distinguished from magical realism or fantasy, in that the supernatural is an abrupt and disruptive intrusion into an otherwise realistic setting.

“[s]ince the early 1990s, ‘History’ and genres of the ‘historical’ have grown exponentially as cultural artefact, discourse, product and focus” (*Consuming History* 2), and that “[t]he historical as a cultural trope developed largely unchecked and unconsidered during the late 1990s and early twenty-first century” (*Consuming History* 2). Therefore, in terms of their manifestation in popular culture, de Groot characterises such terms as “the past” and “history” as “empty signifiers” filled in by the public according to the sources to which they have been exposed (*Consuming History* 1). This suggests an understanding of ‘history’ in its denotative form as “[t]he aggregate of past events; the course of human affairs” (*OED Online*). Neo-Gothic fiction employs this understanding of history to create its setting, atmosphere and characters, and this is also the way in which the characters of Neo-Gothic fiction understand history.

However, Neo-Gothic fiction also exhibits a sense of ‘History’ that expresses the notion of a narrative in which the development of human beings is chronicled in terms of how they have moved from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilised’. This conceptualisation of History as a narrative of progress finds its roots in Enlightenment thought, particularly in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his notion of “universal history”, which suggests that “history as a whole is meaningful” and driven by reason toward a betterment of current being (O’Connor 541). While the distinctions between ‘then’ and ‘now’ have always played a part in the formation of the self and society, it became a particularly prominent distinction during the eighteenth century, with the hegemony of Enlightenment thought and drives to ‘perfect’ and ‘advance’ humankind (Abrams and Harpham 286). This narrative looked forward to an ‘end of history’, at which point humanity will have reached a “final stage of social, rational, and moral perfection” (Abrams and Harpham 286) realised in a perfectly ‘enlightened society’ that operates by the “the light of reason” (Abrams and Harpham 96). What consequently became a *grand* narrative of progress, promoted by Enlightenment thought and carried through up to postmodern revisions and their “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Klein 276), has had a significant impact on the development of Gothic, historical and Neo-Gothic fiction. This thesis will thus refer to the general impression of history as an aggregate of past events (synonymous with ‘the past’) with ‘history’, while ‘History’ with a capital H will be used to refer to the narrative of history that contributes to the grand narrative of human progress.

Neo-Gothic Fiction: Old Methods and New Ways

Despite its likely classification as ‘popular fiction’, Neo-Gothic fiction often exhibits literary concerns that are revealed in its self-aware and parodic use of Gothic and historical fiction conventions. It is my contention that, in Neo-Gothic fiction, the interrogation of the past is most clearly illustrated in 1) the representation of the revenant, whose monstrous ontology disrupts linear understandings of time by haunting ‘modern’ beings with ‘physical’, *present* manifestations of the past, and 2) the characters’ attempts to exorcise the revenant so that they may return to a realistic, reasonable, ‘modern’ present. In this sense, history is configured as an evil Other who haunts the lives of ‘modern’ characters with the injustices upon which ‘modernity’ was built. Neo-Gothic fiction’s self-aware employment of its ‘parent’-genre’s conventions in this way exhibits traits of postmodern parody. In her influential *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Linda Hutcheon writes that postmodern novels are “overtly historical and unavoidably political, precisely because they are formally parodic” (23). Like other postmodernist texts, Neo-Gothic novels present “a contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing to both their own inherent paradoxes and provisionally [sic] and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past” (23).² Thus, despite being easily identified as ‘genre fiction’ – and, therefore, popular fiction (Gelder 1) – due to their use of genre conventions, Neo-Gothic texts display postmodern conventions that blur these simple categories.

The texts chosen for this study – *The Little Stranger* (2009) by Sarah Waters, *The Historian* (2005) by Elizabeth Kostova and *The Accursed* (2013) by Joyce Carol Oates – all exhibit the abovementioned interests and traits. They combine Gothic and historical fiction conventions to present self-aware narratives that apply a sceptical, at times playful, postmodern perspective to historical events and narratives of the twentieth century. As will be explained, Gothic fiction conventions furnish the representation of a disruptive revenant, its uncanny effects and the tradition of exorcism. Historical fiction conventions, on the other hand, provide a platform of verisimilitude onto which the revenant intrudes, and create a continuum between the constructed past of the novel, the ostensible present of the narrator

² Spooner describes these novels as “Gothicised historiographic metafiction” (“Gothic in the Twentieth Century” 44) because they display self-reflexive Gothic narratives set in historical eras, but this informal epithet does not quite capture the texts’ conscious reconfiguration of traditional Gothic and historical fiction tropes. By using the term ‘Neo-Gothic fiction’, I hope to highlight that these texts depend on the manipulation of generic conventions for their revision of historical narratives.

and the 'future' represented in the author and reader's perspectives. Historical fiction conventions thus play a significant role in Neo-Gothic texts' legitimising processes, their construction of setting and their use of history for revisionist purposes.

These conventions are, however, destabilised and interrogated through the refusal of Neo-Gothic texts to provide resolutions that successfully defeat the revenant and restore the equilibrium of a reasonable, realistic world. All three novels problematise the re-establishment of order and 'normalcy', and illustrate that attempts at exorcising the past are already circumscribed by the impossibility of laying history to rest. These three texts have thus been chosen because they exemplify the qualities I have identified as defining or characterising Neo-Gothic fiction. In each text, an element of modern human history is examined and related to notions of civilisation and progress as they are represented in the grand narrative of progress inherited from Enlightenment paradigms. *The Little Stranger*, set in Post-World War II England, is a psychological ghost story that portrays the haunting of great English country house in the tradition of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Narrated by the middleclass Dr Faraday, *The Little Stranger* portrays the paradoxical haunting of something old by something new and displays a particular concern with developments in class relations in 1940s England. *The Historian* stretches over three historical periods in the twentieth century and depicts a vampire hunt that traces the survival of the 'real' Dracula, Vlad the Impaler. Kostova's novel, which also employs conventions from the romance of the archive and the *Bildungsroman*, investigates the making of history and whether progress serves a good or evil purpose. *The Accursed* presents an altogether more difficult text that combines conventions from American Gothic fiction with historiographic metafiction to present a turn-of-the-century account of a 'cursed' family. This novel portrays historical injustices that range from sexism to anti-Semitism, but focuses particularly on how the United States of America's history of slavery and racism haunts its sense of 'modernity' and 'civilisation'. All three texts thus combine various generic conventions to affect an interrogation of the ideas of development, civilisation and advancement propounded by the grand narrative of progress. Their revenants manifest injustices, while the attempts at exorcism carried out by the 'modern' characters illustrate efforts to abject the past in order to create a brighter future.

Methodology and Chapters

This thesis will examine the employment of generic conventions in all three novels in order to investigate their representations of the revenant, history and the grand narrative of progress. In each novel, four elements have been identified that are essential to the respective text's critique of the grand narrative of progress: 1) the representation of historical fears; 2) the orchestration of a Gothic cusp: a moment "of hesitation between barbarism and enlightenment" (Spooner, "Gothic in the Twentieth Century" 43); 3) the 'hauntology', or disruptive ontology, of the text's main revenant and 4) the 'modern' characters' attempts at exorcism. Chapter 1, "Genre, History and the Revenant in Neo-Gothic Fiction", briefly outlines these four points and offers a theoretical framework based on Jacques Derrida's notions of 'hauntology' and 'conjugation' and Julia Kristeva's concept of 'the abject'. Thereafter, Chapters 2 to 4 investigate individual texts in terms of how they represent historical fear, the Gothic cusp, the hauntology of the revenant and the modern characters' attempts at exorcism. Chapter 2, "Haunting in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger*", analyses the novel's critique of the grand narrative of progress by positing the revenant as a Derridean spectre. *The Little Stranger* examines notions of progress through its representation of the tensions between old and new, which it renders ironically through the narrative of a *new* revenant that haunts an *old* family in Post-World War II Britain. The notion of progress is further investigated in Chapter 3: "History and the Perfection of Evil in Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*". Kostova delivers a critique of the Enlightenment narrative of progress by illustrating how the very tools of the Enlightenment – the gathering of knowledge, empiricism and historiography – can be turned from the ideal of perfecting humanity to the nightmare of advancing evil. Chapter 4, "American Dreams and Nightmares in Joyce Carol Oates's *The Accursed*" examines Oates's orchestration of a historical narrative that tries and fails to account for the fantastical revenge wreaked on families who embody the traditional 'American Dream', by analysing its parodic employment of American Gothic fiction conventions.

Neo-Gothic fiction thus offers an alternative narrative of progress: one in which the notion of progress turns from admirable to appalling because of the way in which it has been conceptualised through Enlightenment paradigms. This in itself constitutes an attempt at exorcism, but of a different type: it recognises the appeal to justice that Derrida sees in the spectre, and allows for the preservation of the revenant's alterity in order to let the appeal to

justice stand. To this end, Neo-Gothic fiction relocates the Gothic cusp to the twentieth century and examines the narratives of modernity that inform contemporary understandings of society and humanity. By associating not only monsters with evil, but human history also, Neo-Gothic fiction suggests that such a state as 'modernity' is a highly problematic concept that leaves much to be desired. The notions of 'civilised' and 'primitive' are similarly problematised, and the distance between the two is collapsed through the deconstruction of the grand narrative of progress. Therefore this thesis will show that, through an association forged between notions of evil, History and modernity, Neo-Gothic fiction interrogates our modern conceptions of self and Other.

Chapter 1:

Genre, History and the Revenant in Neo-Gothic Fiction

Jacques Derrida playfully states that “one should not mix genres, one owes it to oneself not to get mixed up in mixing genres” (“The Law of Genre” 57). My thesis politely rejects this advice by seeking to explore an emerging subgenre that is the result of mixing Gothic and historical fiction: ‘Neo-Gothic fiction’. As a subgenre that is particularly concerned with historical discourse and consciousness, Neo-Gothic fiction represents, uses and problematises history through its use of generic conventions from popular fiction. As explained in the Introduction, this thesis aims to evaluate how Neo-Gothic fiction achieves this interrogation by paying particular attention to the subgenre’s critique of the grand narrative of progress. Among the traits that Neo-Gothic fiction inherits from Gothic and historical fiction are the genres’ concerns with the narrative of human history and the need for humans to advance. However, Neo-Gothic fiction problematises the meaning and conceptualisation of ‘advancement’, and interrogates the ethical value of such a notion. In its representation of an evil, Gothic revenant who haunts ‘modern’ characters, Neo-Gothic fiction ironises previous generations’ attempts to exorcise the past, but in so doing performs its own attempted exorcism that is already circumscribed by inevitable failure. Neo-Gothic fiction is painfully aware that history cannot be laid to rest: history, like the revenant, always comes back to haunt the present and the future. Instead, Neo-Gothic fiction allows history to haunt and, through haunting, to present an appeal to justice that draws attention to the wrongs of the past. This chapter gives an account of the development of Neo-Gothic fiction by explaining four elements crucial to its make-up: 1) the representation of historical fear, 2) the orchestration of a Gothic cusp, 3) the hauntology of the revenant and 4) the impulse to exorcise said revenant. Through a discussion of these elements, this chapter establishes a working definition of Neo-Gothic fiction, investigates its inheritances from Gothic and historical fiction and theorises the representation of and reaction to the Neo-Gothic revenant.

This term, ‘Neo-Gothic’, has been used in various ways during Gothic fiction’s development. Jerrold E. Hogle refers to fictions produced during the ‘first’ Gothic Revival of eighteenth century Britain as “fake *neo-gothic*” (“Gothic in Western Culture” 4, his emphasis) to highlight the use of pseudo-historical ideas in a then new form – the Gothic

novel. While Hogle's use of the term refers to the 'original' Gothic, recent critics have repurposed 'neo-gothic' to refer to more modern Gothic works that follow the tradition of those first Gothic novels. For instance, Janet Pérez characterises Gothic writing by female Spanish authors in the post-Franco era as constituting a "feminine neo-gothic mode" (125). Furthermore, Susanne Becker uses the term 'neo-gothic' to group together the works of late twentieth-century female writers in the Gothic mode that are both postmodern and Gothic, and have a specific focus on the construction of gender and the domestic space (4). While my use of 'Neo-Gothic' corresponds with the latter two theorists, I do wish to adapt the term and situate it in a more historical paradigm that focuses on the ways in which history is represented in novels that consciously mimic their generic predecessors. Therefore, while the term 'Neo-Gothic' is not new, it is being used in a new way in this thesis.

In short, this thesis uses 'Neo-Gothic fiction' to refer to a contemporary crop of Gothic tales set in historical eras. In other words, these novels mix the conventions of Gothic and historical fiction to affect their textual aims. Alastair Fowler provides a useful characterisation of this 'mixing' of genres by employing Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances'. Fowler argues that genres present a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" that are like the "various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way" (Wittgenstein s65–77 qtd. in Fowler 41). Fowler continues to state that, "[e]ach is the child [...] of an earlier representative of the genre and may yet be the mother of a subsequent representative" (41). Following this logic, Neo-Gothic fiction can be seen as the 'child' of two popular and often closely associated genres: Gothic and historical fiction. It inherits traits from each generic branch of its family tree, and puts them to use in representing and problematising historical narratives. Although these two genres have developed separately over the years since their 'birth' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they have much in common and derive their narrative concerns from the same major social and literary movements. David Punter argues that it is at times difficult to tell Gothic and historical fiction apart in their early stages, as both draw considerably on the old romances that preceded the rise of the novel while incorporating important developments in thought from the Enlightenment (*Literature of Terror VI 52*). Significantly, both genres centre on the tensions between tradition and progress or, as Punter classifies it, the binary between the primitive and the civilised (*Literature of Terror VI 5*). Accordingly, both genres, in their own ways, promote the grand narrative of progress that has its roots in Enlightenment thought. Moreover, both genres in their original forms associate the past with the primitive

and the present with the civilised, and attempt to exorcise that past through their representations of the struggles and tensions between old and new. The binaries between the civilised and the primitive, tradition and progress, and old and new that form essential elements in both Gothic and historical fiction discourses, are also present in Neo-Gothic fiction, particularly in its representation of ‘historical fear’ and the Gothic cusp.

Historical Fears: Gothic Fiction and the Dead Hand of History

One of the enduring ironies of Gothic fiction, at least in its older forms, is that it is not Gothic at all. As various critics have noted, Gothic fiction employs the Gothic as a source of material and meaning, but ultimately rejects or contains its transgressive nature through the reinforcement of normative values (Baldick xiii). Gothic *fiction* originated as a literary movement influenced by the eighteenth-century Gothic Revival, during which the Gothic *mode* emerged as a counter-discourse to the hegemonic epistemology in Europe at the time: the Enlightenment (Botting, “In Gothic Darkly” 13).¹ Robert Miles defines ‘the Gothic’ as “a discursive site, a ‘carnavalesque’ mode for representations of the fragmented subject” (*Gothic Writing* 4). In this sense, the Gothic presented a disruption of the values touted by Enlightenment thought, which privileged reason, logic and moderation, by embodying excess, transgression and terror (Botting, *Gothic* 1). Gothic fiction, on the other hand, is generally defined and recognised according to texts’ use of conventions like Gothic settings: castles, ruins, haunted spaces; Gothic characters: patriarchal male villains and naïve, persecuted heroines; Gothic monsters: ghosts, vampires, werewolves, etc.; and, in general, a Gothic atmosphere that is created through the combination of the abovementioned conventions (Hogle, “Gothic in Western Culture” 2–3; Botting, *Gothic* 1). This is a very simple classification, but in the absence of greater agreement regarding the definition of Gothic fiction, this list of features serves as an adequate starting point for the discussion of generic inheritances.

Chris Baldick concludes that, apart from addressing cultural anxieties and existential fear, Gothic fiction particularly has to do with *historical* fear. He suggests that “[f]or the Gothic effect to be attained, a tale should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to

¹ It must be noted that, although scholars often describe this difference between Gothic fiction and the Gothic, the terms are rarely rigorously applied, so that ‘the Gothic’ or ‘Gothic’ as a general descriptor are used indiscriminately to qualify fiction, poetry, music and the overarching mode that Miles defines.

produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration” (xix). Thus, while most theorists define Gothic fiction as portraying fear,² Baldick’s specification of Gothic fiction as representing “*historical fear*” (xiii, my emphasis) supplies a definition that cuts to the quick of my characterisation of Gothic fiction: it manifests history through its depiction of revenants, monsters and villains in order to lay the past to rest by ‘exorcising’ what modern characters deem evil. Baldick’s analysis supports this understanding in the suggestion that, “[m]oulding our common existential dread into the more particular shapes of Gothic fiction, then, is a set of ‘historical fears’ focusing upon the memory of an age-old regime of oppression and persecution which threatens still to fix its dead hand upon us” (xxi). This preoccupation is also supported in Punter’s discussion of the first Gothic texts, as well as Miles’s genealogy of Gothic fiction and Botting’s overview, but Baldick most clearly states the Gothic’s relationship with history. This definition also has the benefit of indicating Gothic fiction’s attitude toward History, which has its roots in the primary binary between the primitive and the civilised. The past is not merely a setting or plot device, but its manifestation is also characterised in menacing terms through the representation of the revenant. This manifestation performs the role of threat, is the cause of an intense fear and anxiety about the reach of the past within the text and is often related to a sense of ontological evil associated with the villain or monster.

Gothic Fiction and the Enlightenment

The ‘historical fears’ Baldick references stem from changes in the cultural landscape of England during the eighteenth century.³ Europe was under the influence of the Enlightenment, which, in contrast to ‘the Gothic’ and its eighteenth-century association with all that was old, signified all that was new. The Enlightenment is commonly known as the ‘Age of Reason’ that developed during the seventeenth century in Western Europe and reached its apex in the eighteenth century (Abrams and Harpham 96). In light of its focus on new discovery, mastery over nature and the advancement of humankind, the Enlightenment condemned the fantasy, supernaturalism and “imaginative frenzy” (Botting, *Gothic 2*) of the Gothic mode as dangerous and regressive. As Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno state, “the Enlightenment’s program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel

² See Punter, *The Literature of Terror* and Dani Cavallaro’s *The Gothic Vision* (2002), for instance.

³ Although Gothic fiction was also influenced by developments in fiction from continental Europe (particularly the German *Ritter-, Räuber-, and Schauerroman* and the French *roman noire* and *roman frénétique*), these manifestations fall outside of the scope of this thesis, which is concerned with Anglo-American manifestations of Gothic fiction.

myths [and] overthrow fantasy with knowledge” (1). Two of its principle aims were the use of reason and science to uncover universal truths, and the perfection of the human as a logical, reasoned being. Positivism and empirical observation were employed to encompass the world in a system of knowledge that left little room for other human faculties, like passion and imagination (Punter, *Literature of Terror VI* 23). The Gothic mode, with its focus on that which Enlightenment principles abjected as dark and dangerous, thus presented something wholly other to the eighteenth-century British popular imagination: set against the strictures of reason and balance promoted in Neoclassical art, architecture and literature,⁴ the Gothic presented an avenue for expression that allowed for fancy, the marvellous and the supernatural. Fred Botting suggests that “[t]he Enlightenment, which produced the maxims and models of modern culture, also invented the Gothic” (“In Gothic Darkly” 13), and this is clear in the notion that the Gothic represents the ‘darkness’ that the Enlightenment sought to banish.

The historical fears that play into the initial Gothic offerings of the eighteenth century thus represented an anxiety over banishing the darkness of a superstitious and ignorant past that was embodied in eighteenth-century understandings of the word ‘Gothic’. At this point in time, ‘Gothic’ was a “general and derogatory term for the Middle Ages which conjured up ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness” (Botting, *Gothic* 15). The ‘age-old’ regime of oppression and persecution was identified in Europe’s history of ignorance, cruelty and decadence – a history that Enlightenment thinkers sought to banish through reason, positivism and free-thinking. In this opposition between the Enlightenment and the Gothic, one can distinguish the central binaries that fed into the structural make-up of Gothic fiction: civilised versus primitive, light versus dark, reason versus superstition and new versus old (Punter and Byron 7). In each case, Gothic fiction reinforced the former and condemned or contained the latter, thereby perpetuating Enlightenment narratives of progress, advancement through reason and the perfectability of humankind (Abrams and Harpham 96). As such, Gothic fiction presented a paradoxically ‘Enlightened’ discourse that supported the Enlightenment motto of ‘*incredulous odi*’: that which I cannot believe, disgusts me (Clery, “Genesis of ‘Gothic’ Fiction” 22). Institutions like the Catholic Church, absolute monarchy and feudalism were

⁴ The Neoclassical period demarcates the time between the Restoration in 1660 and the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, when art, literature and architecture were heavily influenced by attempts to recapture classical genius. In terms of literature, Neoclassical authors sought to replicate the structures, rules and concerns of classical writing and strove towards “their ideals of moderation, decorum and urbanity” (Abrams and Harpham 254).

represented through Gothic villains who exercised unreasonable power over heroes, who in turn embodied ‘modern’, middle-class, Protestant sensibilities (Miles, “Eighteenth-Century Gothic” 17). Superstition was also manifested through the representation of Gothic monsters, ghosts, demons and the like, who were duly defeated through the application of sound reason, science and faith in the betterment of humanity. As will be discussed in more detail later on, the monsters’ or ghosts’ liminal natures posed a threat to Enlightenment attempts to understand and categorise the world, while the villains of early Gothic fiction were characterised as relics threatening to drag heroes and heroines back into a barbaric past.

The Rise of Gothic Fiction

In order to orchestrate this complex reinforcement of Enlightenment values, early Gothic authors set their tales in the past and created villains that embodied the despotic, feudal and regressive elements then associated with medieval Europe. Authors like Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and ‘Monk’ Lewis depicted a past that would ultimately be condemned by their ‘modern’ characters, who presented anachronistic embodiments of eighteenth-century values (Baldick and Mighall 278). In these texts, modern values are confirmed by the narratives’ privileging of modern virtues through the formulaic plots employed by Gothic authors. This structural caveat became an (only sometimes successful) method of legitimisation at a time when the portrayal of the fantastical, supernatural or frivolous was severely frowned upon. The historical fears represented in these early Gothic texts therefore set the formula for Gothic fiction to come, which would evolve around the central motif of history haunting the present and future. The models set by these first Gothic fiction authors give some sense of the development of the genre and its deployment in Neo-Gothic fiction later on.

Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*⁵ (1764) is generally considered the first Gothic novel because it was the first to mark itself as “a Gothic Story”. The novel appeared with a preface explaining that the translator found the tome in “the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England”, and that it was “printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529” (Walpole 5). In this guise, *Otranto* received positive reviews that lauded its entertainment value and begged excuse for its antique naiveties (Clery, *Supernatural Fiction* 53). However, when Walpole published a second edition that bore his name as well as a preface that explained his ‘experiment’, reviews rapidly denounced such a folly. As E. J. Clery points out, *Otranto* was “something unprecedented and untenable – a ‘gothic story’, [...] with a *modern*

⁵ Henceforth referred to as *Otranto*.

author” (*Supernatural Fiction* 54, her emphasis). Walpole insists on the value of the imagination as a source of inspiration and meaning, and justified his aesthetic and literary departure as follows:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern.⁶ In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. (9)

Although the success of his endeavour to blend the improbable with realism is still disputed, his ‘manifesto’ was highly influential in the formation of the genre. *Otranto* also provides the foundation of Gothic fiction conventions, and its castle setting, pretention at a ‘found manuscript’ and concern with family and inheritance would become tropes of the genre. Moreover, *Otranto* establishes the basic tenets of the Gothic plot, which involves an unexpected and, indeed, “fearful inheritance” (Baldick xxi), ancestral ghosts whose appearance mark a disturbance in the ‘natural’ or the ‘normal’ (usually precipitated by some past evil act) and heroes and heroines who re-establish the ‘natural’ order by exorcising the evil that elicited the ghosts’ appearances in the first place. The ‘dead hand’ of history, represented in the usurping, patriarchal villain Manfred and his attempts to continue his false line, are cast off by young, forward-looking protagonists. Neo-Gothic fiction mimics this formula by representing characters who similarly think of themselves as modern in opposition to a revenant who embodies the past.

The trends of chronologically distant settings, joining history and realism with the fantastic and invoking the past in order to validate the present would continue through to define Gothic fiction’s ‘golden age’: 1790–1820. Out of the plethora of Gothic tales penned and published during this time, the fictions of Ann Radcliffe, by all accounts the ‘mother’ of Gothic fiction, Matthew Gregory Lewis and, much later, Charles Robert Maturin, are distinguished as the great works that pushed the genre forward. These authors’ texts, along with those of Walpole and his immediate successors – Sophia Lee and Clara Reeve – make up what David Punter and Glennis Byron refer to as the ‘original’ Gothic fiction (xviii).⁷

⁶ ‘Ancient’ here refers to the medieval romances popularised during the eighteenth-century Gothic Revival by antiquarians like Bishop Hurd, Thomas Gray, James Macpherson and Thomas Percy (Punter and Byron 9). Although not all of them presented authentic medieval romances, the style of employing an exotic setting, supernatural beings and folklore established a sense of ancient tradition. The ‘modern’ refers to the realist novels of authors like Samuel Johnson and Henry Fielding, which eschewed the fantastical for greater psychological depth and didactic endeavours.

⁷ As Catherine Spooner, among others, has pointed out, the attribution of ‘original’ to ‘the Gothic’ is problematic, as there is technically no such thing as ‘the original Gothic’. The Gothic is always already a revival of something from the past (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 11). However, these texts do present the first novels

These novels established the conventions of Gothic fiction that would be experimented with and expanded on as the genre developed. They are responsible for the tropes of haunted mansions and castles, secret passages, virginal heroines and, above all, Gothic villains. These original Gothic novels thus established the importance of history to the genre. As Steven Bruhm explains,

[I]n the late eighteenth-century Gothic [...] moments from the historical past (often appearing as spectral figures) haunt the heroes in order to proclaim some misdeed regarding property or domestic relations. It is often the project of those novels to expose ancient tyrannies, to foil the characters perpetuating them, and to return property and persons to their divinely ordained spheres. In so doing, the classical Gothic returns its society to a logic of historical progression. (267)

This is why Baldick characterises Gothic fiction as tales that “invoke the tyranny of the past [...] with such weight as to stifle the hopes of the present [...] within the dead-end of physical incarceration” (xix). In this sense, Gothic fiction represents historical fear through its structural elements, but particularly in the characterisation of the villain or revenant and the interaction between the text’s heroes and villains.

The tensions between the Gothic past and Enlightenment ideals continue after the original Gothic fiction, albeit in different forms. The period between the 1790s and 1820 marks the first and last literary epoch that critics unanimously term ‘Gothic’ (Punter, “The Ghost of a History” 1). By the latter date, the market was saturated with highly formulaic and imitative work that failed to push Gothic fiction in new directions, and only a few works stood out as truly contributing to the genre (Punter, *Literature of Terror VI* 114). The next big innovations were made in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Following a brief period during which notable texts were only loosely associated with Gothic fiction, what is today called ‘Victorian Gothic’⁸ emerged in the 1840s (Warwick, “Victorian Gothic” 30). The Victorian Gothic took a decidedly domestic and sensational turn (Punter and Byron 26), and the sense of “historical fear” was translated into a desperate fear of degeneration (Punter and Byron 39). As Botting states, traces of the original Gothic works “appear as signs of loss and nostalgia, projections of a culture possessed of an increasingly disturbing sense of deteriorating identity, order and spirit” (*Gothic* 74). The setting of these stories accordingly moved increasingly to the present of their authors, but they invoked terror based on the fear

that used the Gothic in such away, and can safely be termed the ‘original Gothic fiction’. For this reason, this thesis will be careful to refer to these works as the original Gothic *fiction*, in accordance with the distinction made above between Gothic and Gothic fiction.

⁸ The ‘Victorian Gothic’ as a term is generally used by critics to denote the literature produced in the Gothic fiction genre during the Victorian period. Thus, when I use the term ‘Victorian Gothic’, I am referring to the subgenre of Gothic fiction, and not a Victorian version of the Gothic mode or aesthetic.

of regressing to a barbaric and degenerate past (Punter and Byron 39–40). Also during this time, a “significant diffusion of Gothic traces” took place in the “forms of realism, sensation novels and ghost stories especially” (Botting, *Gothic* 74). National strains, like the American, Scottish and Irish Gothic, soon emerged with their own particular emphases and nightmares, and Gothic fiction eventually dispersed into postmodern pastiche and playfulness.⁹

With these transformations, the definition of Gothic fiction became similarly splintered and increasingly vague and amorphous, when – in the absence of enough concrete thematic or topical ties – a handful of Gothic tropes can make a Gothic text. The historical settings and concern with history became more abstract as Gothic fiction moved toward “terrors and horrors that are much closer to home” (Botting, *Gothic* 74), both chronologically and geographically. While the central binary between primitive and civilised and the haunting of the present by the past remained informing concepts, they took on various and at times more subtle appearances, so that the sense of “historical fear” was most clearly represented in the evil ghosts, monsters and villains that continued to populate Gothic fiction. Neo-Gothic fiction drags that fear back into the limelight, and returns to the original Gothic novel’s concern with the (un)dead hand of History.

The Gothic Cusp: Historical Settings for ‘Gothic’ and ‘Modern’ Selves

One of the main features of Gothic and Neo-Gothic fiction is the orchestration of a clash between old and new. This clash is theorised by Robert Miles as a ‘Gothic cusp’: “a period when the feudal and modern eras were understood to overlap” (*Gothic Writing* 214–215). In Gothic and Neo-Gothic fiction, the orchestration of the Gothic cusp is particularly facilitated through the setting, which places characters in historically significant moments of conflict between past and present. In this sense, the conventions of historical fiction play a significant role in establishing a realistic setting that can represent the forces of old and new in a meaningful context. This section will therefore discuss Miles’s Gothic cusp alongside similar notions distinguished in the development of historical fiction, a genre that owes many of its initial conventions to the original Gothic novels. In Neo-Gothic fiction, historical fiction conventions are used as ‘legitimizing’ processes that construct a reasonable and realistic

⁹ The scope of this project does not allow for even a short exposition of these developments, as they are too numerous and complex even in brief. The more relevant strains on which the chosen texts draw will, however, be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

world onto which the supernatural intrudes as a wholly Other manifestation.¹⁰ The evolution of historical fiction also contributes toward an understanding of Neo-Gothic fiction's revisionist drive, as genre developments in the late twentieth-century focused on the revision of previously marginalised narratives. This will be discussed in light of postmodern developments of historical fiction, but an understanding of the Gothic cusp, traditional historical fiction and their relations to the grand narrative of progress must first be established.

Once again, the Gothic cusp is significantly influenced by the socio-cultural and historical underpinnings of eighteenth-century Britain. Botting explains that:

The rejection of feudal barbarity, superstition and tyranny was necessary to a culture defining itself in diametrically opposed terms: its progress, civilisation and maturity depended on the distance it established between the values of the present and the past. ("In Gothic Darkly" 14)

This distance was established, paradoxically, by juxtaposing the present with the past in a constructed historical setting. As Miles explains, "[t]he significance of this setting is that it allows an apposition between Gothic and modern 'selves', the playing of one against the other" (*Gothic Writing* 215). Miles's use of 'Gothic' here refers to the Gothic mode. Those 'Gothic selves' represent the subjects that would stand in binary opposition to Enlightenment, or what was then considered 'modern', subjects. This supports the notion that Gothic fiction used Gothic tropes to affect their meanings, as the 'Gothic selves' Miles speaks of relate to the 'primitive' or 'less civilised' selves Gothic fiction abjects. It is not, however, a simple dismissal of the past. The Gothic cusp is a site of tension and struggle, in which characters are caught between the two opposing forces of past and present. This notion can be related to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's evaluation of historical fiction, which suggests that historical novels focus on the tensions between what he terms "the two great moving Principles of social Humanity": a "*religious adherence to the Past and the Ancient, the Desire and the admiration of Permanence*" versus the "*Passion for increase of Knowledge, for Truth as the offspring of Reason, in short, the mighty Instincts of Progression and Free-agency*" (qtd. in Dekker 35, my emphasis). In Neo-Gothic fiction, this tension is apparent in the construction of the Gothic cusp, which makes the struggle between Coleridge's two principles immediate and identifiable in a specific moment of change.

¹⁰ While the 'realism' created in Neo-Gothic fiction is disrupted by the intrusion of the supernatural, the establishment of this initial sense of normality is crucial to the impact of the supernatural. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

The Gothic cusp will accordingly be used in this thesis as follows: it is the spatio-temporal point at which the tension between old and new is actualised in the Neo-Gothic novel. Botting writes that Gothic fiction presents a “heterotopic mirror” that distorts the mimetic drive of realist fiction with its disruption of reality and chronology (“In Gothic Darkly” 19). I wish to suggest that it is particularly in the concept of the Gothic cusp, understood in conjunction with Coleridge’s ‘moving principles’, that heterotopia is presented in Neo-Gothic fiction. Michel Foucault describes heterotopias as “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). These sites are “absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about” in that they are simultaneously real and unreal, and reflect liminal states of either crisis or deviance (Foucault 24–25). The Gothic cusp presents a cultural moment of crisis when humans “arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time”, when both ‘times’ – the past and the present – are distinguishable and foregrounded in one ‘site’ of representation (Foucault 26). The Gothic cusp represents such a “heterochrony” (Foucault 26): a threshold during which the new attempts to break with the old in order to achieve progress. Foucault further suggests that to enter heterotopias, one must “submit to rites and purifications”, make “certain gestures” and have “certain permission” (26). This is reflected in the violence of modernity – progress is achieved through a break or some upheaval that attempts to purify the modern self of its pastness. In Gothic and Neo-Gothic fiction, this notion is represented through attempts to exorcise a revenant, whose disruptive ontology marks a violent break of chronology and epistemology.

This tension between a tradition of respecting the past and the instinct to transcend it through progress is evident in all three genres under discussion in this thesis. It presents the essential intersection between Gothic, historical and Neo-Gothic fiction, for all three exhibit a concern with discourses of progress and representing the clash between old and new, past and present. In *The Little Stranger*, this tension is expressed through the confrontation of socio-economic classes during a transitional period, in which a declining aristocratic family falls prey to the vehemence of a rising middleclass doctor who represents both the drive for progress and the “desire and [...] admiration of Permanence” he finds embodied in Hundreds Hall. *The Historian*, on the other hand, represents the two principles in its *Bildungsroman* narrative, which pits a young girl and several academics against an ancient aristocrat who seeks to chronicle and thus preserve the forces and history of evil. *The Accursed*, set in turn-of-the-century America, relates the principles in its clash between self-proclaimed ‘modern’

characters who feel that civilisation has been achieved and the Gothic revenants who illustrate just how tenuous a notion ‘civilisation’ is. Through detailed analysis, it becomes clear that illustrating the central tensions between progress and tradition, civilisation and the primitive and new and old forms the crux of Neo-Gothic fiction’s use of Gothic and historical fiction conventions, and that the representation of these tensions also allows this new subgenre to subvert its ‘parent’ genres’ representation of the grand narrative of progress.

Historical Fiction Inheritances and Subversions

In order for this subversive representation to be achieved, Neo-Gothic fiction must first establish a realistic setting into which the revenant can intrude. Neo-Gothic fiction gains from historical fiction the legitimating techniques authors use to convince the reader of a historical novel’s authenticity. The “*effet de réel*” (Wesseling 30, borrowing from Barthes) is critical because, as Bryony Stocker notes, “historical accuracy confers authenticity or ‘truth’ on the lives and experiences of characters placed in a moment of social change or historical significance” (309). The historical novel, which established these generic conventions, is as much a product of the Enlightenment as the Gothic novel. It finds its roots in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century developments in historiography, the novel, Romanticism and in Gothic fiction itself. During the eighteenth century, leaps in historical discourse and history became “all the rage” in British society (Stevens 1). At this time, sharp distinctions between historical fact and fictional invention were formed (Hamnett 17). History also attained a moral and didactic purpose (Hamnett 18) that resulted in the understanding that the ‘lessons’ of the past could contribute to a better, or more “reasonable” present (Lukács 20). Through these developments, historical fiction came to be judged by its morality and didactic potential, and verisimilitude consequently became increasingly important (Stevens 128). This extended beyond the “costumery” and “curiosities and oddities of the *milieu*” (Lukács 19) to the characterisation of historical figures. Georg Lukács firmly hails Sir Walter Scott as the father of historical fiction when he states: “What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age” (19). The setting is thus recognised as more than a mere backdrop; it functions as an overarching element that significantly informs other structural considerations, like characterisation and plot.

As Lukács asserts, these elements are demonstrated in Scott’s “Waverly Novels” (19), which established the conventions of early historical fiction. Scott’s novels were more historiographical than their contemporaries and made explicit use of historical information

and historical characters. His novels also realised their historical milieus with greater attention to the uniqueness of the particular past epoch than other narratives of the time (Hamnett 98). Moreover, as Avrom Fleishman emphasises, Scott's novels successfully tied the past to the present and showed the process of history in influencing present concerns and issues (24). For several theorists, it is this palimpsestic conjunction of representing the past in relation to present social issues that distinguishes Scott's historical fiction from its contemporaneous genres, including Gothic fiction and the realist novel. The central distinction of historical fiction's representation of the past is thus identified in its relation to the present, and the subsequent formation of a binary between old and new that is realised in terms of the distance between characters and readers. This factor would become a defining feature that is inherited by the Neo-Gothic novels under discussion in this thesis. While *The Little Stranger*, *The Historian* and *The Accursed* all depict very particular moments in history, each setting speaks to contemporary issues that can be related to the prejudices, oppressions and injustices identified in the chosen setting. This will be discussed in more detail in each text's individual chapter, but it is important to note that the continuum established between constructed pasts and 'real' presents form an integral part of Neo-Gothic fiction's critique of the grand narrative of progress.

The late twentieth-century resurgence of the historical fiction genre took this element to the next level, when authors attempted to engage in revisionist storytelling that focused on issues of race, gender and class. These postmodern novels pushed the development of historical fiction forward, and made a clear break with the traditional conventions represented in Scott's 'Waverley-model'. Critics have identified the main point of difference between traditional and postmodern historical fiction in the newer novels' sceptical approach to history. Whereas traditional historical novels exhibited a nostalgia for the past, critics like Linda Hutcheon suggest that postmodern works return to history with a critical eye in order to scrutinise and problematise its metanarratives (4, 19). Hutcheon concludes that "[t]he postmodern, then, effects two simultaneous moves. It reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" (89). This resulted in a crop of postmodernist, revisionist historical novels that aimed to highlight previously marginalised historical narratives. These revisionist novels were particularly developed through the efforts of feminist and postcolonial authors like Jean Rhys, whose *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) gives voice to the silenced Bertha Mason of Emily Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Further experimentations in feminist rewritings of history appear in the works of Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson and, one of the authors discussed in

this thesis, Sarah Waters (Robinson 26–27). With postmodern experiments, feminist authors have pushed the envelope in terms of the rewriting of history as well as the use of Gothic tropes for subversive purposes (Spooner, “Gothic in the Twentieth Century” 44). Neo-Gothic fiction continues in the vein of these authors by foregrounding issues of gender and sexuality, which often play into notions of progress and civilisation, as well as twenty-first century conceptions of what progress and civilisation mean. This can be seen in *The Little Stranger*’s investigations of class and gender, *The Historian*’s portrayal of evil and historiography, and *The Accursed*’s representation of race, gender and notions of civilisation. These aspects will be examined through each novel’s use of historical representations and discourse, but it is also important to note that revision is achieved through the manipulation of structural elements like setting, characterisation and plot. Perhaps as important an inheritance as the revisionist drive, Neo-Gothic fiction also receives from historical fiction its legitimising techniques. These, crucially, attempt to establish a sense of ‘authenticity’ in an overtly fictional narrative, and aid in establishing the Gothic cusp.

***Effets de Réel* in Neo-Gothic Fiction**

The first point of creating an *effet de réel* lies in the representation of a historical milieu. Historical novels are still judged in reviews by their ability to accurately depict historical details, and thus the representation of “period-appropriate” (Stevens 141) details makes or breaks the construction of a historical setting, and the level of convincing detail directly influences the sense of a text’s authenticity (Stevens 142). Elisabeth Wesseling notes that historical fiction “embedded characters in a closely detailed network of material circumstances by way of extensive descriptions of the costumes, architecture, landscape, manners, customs, and the like of former epochs” (51). These elements, which Fleishman collectively calls “local-color history” (22), serve as the most easily recognisable markers of time and place. Neo-Gothic fiction uses these conventions of faithfully representing the language, clothes and behaviour of the characters to create a realistic setting that the reader can identify as belonging to the specified historical epoch. Moreover, Neo-Gothic fiction depicts the attitudes and beliefs that denizens of a particular historical era might have had in order to faithfully represent the “social and cultural history” (Stevens 141) of the time, and might make reference to important historical people and events to augment this representation. These sorts of details and references contribute greatly to the construction of a realistic historical setting which is, it must be emphasised, crucial to Neo-Gothic fiction’s revisionist imperative.

Beyond the basic representation of the historical setting, Neo-Gothic fiction seeks to create an enhanced sense of realism through narrative situation and material historical frameworks. As in what Martha Tuck Rozett terms “New Historical Fiction”,¹¹ Neo-Gothic texts often employ first person narrators who self-consciously perform the role of storyteller (28). The narrator is often a chronicler who presents his or her personal account as an attempt to rationally explain a supernatural event, to come to terms with the trauma caused by a revenant or to exorcise and defeat that revenant. These first person narrators frequently use the Gothic fiction convention of presenting their accounts as ‘found manuscripts’ in the form of diaries, memoirs, text books or historical chronicles written by professional historians. This is often explained to the reader through an author’s note, introduction or explanatory section, a technique that has also been a feature of historical fiction “since Walter Scott’s *Waverley*” (de Groot, *Consuming History* 217). A “material historical framework” (de Groot, *Consuming History* 217) such as this contributes to a sense of the text’s authenticity by attempting to explain how the manuscript was found, how it was created or why it was written. Rozett suggests that first person narrators in historical fiction help to root the novel in its historical setting by “contribut[ing] to the creation of a speaking voice that is at once modern and centuries-old” (28). In Neo-Gothic texts, this often takes the form of a narrator’s self-aware confession that the events he or she describes might seem beyond belief, but with the resolution that his or her account offers the only evidence it can provide through research, the narrator’s meticulous observations and his or her personal experiences.

Furthermore, Neo-Gothic fiction often employs these techniques to affect the sort of empirical air required of historiography and scientific observation. Just as historical fiction is “modelled on historiography” (Hutcheon 113), Neo-Gothic texts model the presentation of their narrators’ accounts on historical accounts. As explained above, texts are presented as memoirs and journals, but these forms are, crucially, presented in such a manner as to mimic the scientist’s observation and meticulous note-taking, or the historian’s compilation of facts in a study. Neo-Gothic fiction often employs these techniques to represent the clash of Western Enlightenment epistemologies of positivism and empiricism with the inherently transgressive ontology of the revenant. In Neo-Gothic texts, then, two seemingly opposing forces work against each other. The first is the supernatural element, which constitutes the disruption to order theorised in structuralist Tzvetan Todorov’s narrative model. This model

¹¹ Rozett’s term is applied to contemporary historical fiction in the tradition of Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980). These texts feature “a resistance to old certainties about what happened and why; a recognition of the subjectivity, the uncertainty, the multiplicity of ‘truths’ inherent in any account of past events; and a disjunctive, self-conscious narrative, frequently produced by eccentric and/or multiple narrating voices” (2).

suggests that narratives consist of the following structural elements: the initial equilibrium, a disruption of that equilibrium, attempts at restoration and then the creation of a new equilibrium (75). Todorov describes the initial equilibrium as “a stable but not static relation between the members of a society; it is a social law, a rule of the game, a particular system of exchange” (75). In Neo-Gothic fiction, that equilibrium takes the form of a realistic, ‘natural’ world. The supernatural is then the force that disrupts the order of the ‘real’, tangible world set up through historical fiction conventions. The second force is precisely those narrative techniques, like the ‘found manuscript’ and ‘author’s note’, meant to persuade the reader of the reality of the text despite its supernatural element. The *effet de réel* is created through these techniques in order to keep the reader’s disbelief in suspense, and to focus their attention on the manifestation of history in the form of the revenant.

Hauntology and the Revenant in Neo-Gothic Fiction

Whereas the previous sections focused on delineating the form and formation of Neo-Gothic fiction through explanations of historical fear and the Gothic cusp, this section will pay specific attention to its representation of the revenant and its hauntology.¹² As mentioned above, it is my contention that the revenants of Neo-Gothic fiction constitute the subgenre’s most potent manifestations of history because they embody a transgressive ontology that may be termed evil, and it is made to clash with Enlightenment epistemology. Revenants, supernatural beings who defy the ‘normal’ strictures of ontology by coming back from the dead, are represented as evil manifestations whose very beings disrupt the good and the natural. In structural terms, they fulfil the role of villain or monster in Gothic fiction and bear many of the traits associated with Gothic monsters,¹³ including an a priori classification as evil. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that cultures can be examined along the lines of the monsters they produce, whether in literature or history, because monsters pose a problem to a culture’s formation of identity. He maintains that “[t]he monster *haunts*; it does not simply

¹² I favour the term ‘revenant’ because it includes not only ghosts, but any form of the undead, and thus encapsulates more of what Gothic fiction and Neo-Gothic fiction have to offer (such as vampires, zombies and other liminal monsters associated with return). Theories that have to do with the concept of the revenant use various terms to describe this phenomenon. Here, the revenant can stand in for Derrida’s ‘spectre’, because Derrida himself uses the term ‘revenant’ quite often (*Specters* 2, 5, 11, etc.), and it should also be taken as a form of ‘monster’ due to its liminal nature.

¹³ As Julia Briggs points out in her work on ghost stories, the nature and appearance of the supernatural in Gothic fiction might differ significantly in terms of subject, but not in *kind* (177). Thus while each manifestation of monstrous ontology has its specific characteristics, the disruptions to epistemology and ontology that their liminal beings incur can be theorised collectively. While my thesis concentrates on the ghost and vampire as revenants, there is a multitude of variations in the nature of the revenant that still have the same disruptive effects.

bring past and present together, but destroys the boundary that demanded their twinned foreclosure” (ix–x, his emphasis). Cohen further explains that monsters pose “a code or a pattern or a presence or an absence that unsettles what has been constructed to be received as natural, as human” (ix). In Neo-Gothic fiction, the code posed by the revenant presents a pattern of historical violence and injustices that endure beyond their assigned teleologies; in other words, these vestiges of a ‘dark’ or ‘primitive’ society survive into a supposedly enlightened modernity. As described in previous sections, in order for the ‘modern’ self to deem itself ‘modern’, the violence and injustices of the past must be purged and exorcised. The revenant defies this purification by manifesting those injustices in its spectral form. Revenants are, quite literally, the spectres of history who haunt the present with its past. Therefore, the representation of the revenant can illustrate the authors’ attempts to rewrite historical narratives, while the ‘modern’ characters’ attempts at exorcising them represent endeavours to abject the past in favour of the present and future. In order to theorise these factors, this thesis will employ a critical framework based on Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology and conjurement, as well as Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection. First, however, the question of evil must be addressed.

Evil, Monstrousness and the Revenant

The question of ‘evil’ in literature usually requires a complicated answer, but evil in genre fiction is at times easier to explain. Formulaic fiction presents villains that are easily distinguishable, and often assigns evil as a simple descriptor of character (Cole 14). Neo-Gothic fiction also exhibits this simple classification, but complicates the notion of evil by locating it in a *monster* that stands as a sign or code for the evil in *human* history. The evil attributed to the revenant thus forms a significant part of its representation. They are not judged evil by their moral actions or even attitudes, but rather by their very beings. In this sense, Neo-Gothic fiction also harks back to early Gothic fiction, in that it depicts monsters and villains as evil rather than merely antagonistic. The fact that it employs the notion of evil at all is almost anachronistic. During the latter half of the twentieth century and particularly in the aftermath of postmodernism, ‘evil’ became a largely obsolete word reserved for fiction, religious distinctions and political manoeuvring (Geddes 1; Cole 1–2). Theoretical and philosophical discussions on evil, such as Phillip Cole’s *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy* (2006), have shifted to the question of whether it exists at all, or whether ‘evil’ still serves as an adequate term. In its manifestation in fiction, particularly popular fiction, it is largely taken for granted as a character trait that justifies the villain’s actions. However, I

hope to illustrate that Neo-Gothic fiction employs the notion in a meaningful way to comment on History and humanity. For now, a short exposition of what I mean when I say that the revenant is considered ‘evil’ should suffice as a foundation for more detailed discussions in later chapters.

To begin with, evil is most simply defined as the antithesis of good, and thereby denotes the “morally depraved, bad, wicked [and] vicious” (*OED Online*). Traditionally, evil was determined morally and theologically, and relied on the distinctions between ‘good’ behaviour and ‘bad’ behaviour as they relate to conceived higher powers of either good or evil. More recently and particularly in the aftermath of postmodernism, conceptions of evil have splintered into various fields with context-specific definitions (Geddes 1–3). Even broadly speaking, however, the understanding of evil remains largely generalised and contested. Some critics, like Ronald Paulson, define evil as a matter of degree and quality (1). It is a manifestation of something that is not only wrong, but which crosses the limits of acceptability by “the *nth* power” (1): wrongdoing “*plus* dimension (6 million), intention (genocide, ‘racial cleansing’), or the gratuitously cruel (forcing a child to mutilate or kill its parents); in short, whatever is worst, or is unthinkable or even unimaginable” (2, his emphasis). Others create taxonomies of evil that delineate different types of evil found in the world. One such example is Roger Shattuck’s breakdown, which is based on various other classifications of evil: there is ‘natural evil’, which pertains to “elemental disasters and scourges” (50); ‘moral evil’, a strain of *wrongdoing* that allows for the redemption of its perpetrator (50); ‘radical evil’, which relates to “*immoral behaviour* so pervasive in a person or a society that moral scruples and constraints have been utterly abandoned” (50, my emphasis) and ‘metaphysical evil’, which “designates an *assenting and approving attitude* toward moral and radical evil, as evidence of superior will and power in human beings” (50). One thing that these conceptualisations of evil do have in common, however, is the notion that evil is an act visited upon humans, as opposed to a quality or trait possessed by humans themselves. One of the most common distinctions of evil, consequently, is that it seeks the annihilation or suppression of that which is considered human. In this popular conception, to be evil is to be inhuman (Cole 13–14). The only beings in whom evil can then be located, traditionally, are monsters.

The ‘evil’ represented by revenants in Neo-Gothic fiction is therefore not morally determined, but rather based on the ‘monstrous’ ontology of the spectre, vampire, or demon. Essentially, this classification is based on the concept that monsters or revenants are either devoid of humanity, or present a corruption of what it means to be human. This is not to say

that Neo-Gothic texts do not touch on notions of morality or associate revenants with wrongdoing, but it must be stressed that ‘evil’ is an a priori classification for revenants that is, it appears, based on their beings rather than their actions. This understanding of their evil is evident in the instinctual reaction elicited from ‘modern’ characters, who identify evil through sense rather than experience. The revenants inspire fear in ‘modern’ characters because ‘wrongness’ or ‘unnaturalness’ permeates their beings. In his influential *Monster Studies* (1996), Cohen suggests that monsters are “disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration” (6). The monster’s status as hybrid makes it inherently dangerous – it threatens the painstakingly established boundaries of self, culture and society. It is anathema to the “too-precise laws of nature as set forth by science” (6), which it “gleefully” (6) violates through its composite being. Their very beings therefore disrupt the normal, and call attention to the unnatural. This sense of corruption and disruption is theorised in the concepts of hauntology and the abject, which, while generally avoiding the term ‘evil’, help to explain the classification of revenants as such. Hauntology presents a theoretical configuration of the ‘ontological evil’ of the revenant in its explanation of the ontology of spectres, who disrupt time and being through their (non)presence. The abject and abjection furthermore serve to explain the ontology of revenants, but also crucially offer an understanding of characters’ reactions to the ghosts, vampires and demons that they encounter.

The Hauntology of the Revenant

The notion of ‘haunting’ as a theoretical tool for understanding manifestations of history has become an increasingly popular approach to analysis. Following Derrida’s *The Specters of Marx*, which analyses the legacy of Marxism by comparing it to a spectre haunting the present and future, critics have identified a ‘spectral turn’ in academic discourse that focuses on the theoretical potential of ghosts, spectres and hauntings (Blanco and Peeren, “Conceptualizing Spectralities” 2). This thesis accordingly employs Derrida’s concepts of ‘hauntology’ and ‘conjunction’ to analyse Neo-Gothic fiction’s representation of its revenants, as well as its characters’ impulse to exorcise them. ‘Hauntology’, Derrida suggests, describes the “deconstructive logic” (“Spectrographies” 117) of the spectre or revenant, who presents an ontology that disrupts boundaries through its ethic of unintelligibility. The revenant is thus “[a]together other” (*Specters* 10), because it *is* being and non-being, presence and absence, past and future, in time and out of it (*Specters* 4; 6). This entity thereby marks that time, being and knowing are disrupted. As William

Shakespeare's Marcellus succinctly observes in *Hamlet*, the appearance of the spectre indicates that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.90). Derrida's understanding of 'conjunction' will be discussed in a later section, as it pertains to modern characters' need to contain and exorcise the spectre.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida offers his deliberations on the legacy of Marxism in the form of a meditation on ghosts and haunting. He invokes Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which contains perhaps the most famous spectre in literature: the alleged ghost of Hamlet's father. The characteristics he identifies in King Hamlet's alleged ghost are transposed onto the legacy of Marxism and, more broadly, onto the 'spectral' presence of that which is physically absent – history. Through this conceptualisation, Derrida theorises the spectre as presenting a "deconstructive logic" ("Spectographies" 117) that "undoes established binaries and challenges foundational, presentist, and teleological modes of thinking" (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, "Spectral Turn" 33). In other words, the spectre challenges Western metaphysics or what Derrida calls the 'metaphysics of presence'.¹⁴ The spectre's "deconstructive logic" also presents a call to justice, because, as Colin Davis surmises, "[a]ttending to the ghost is an ethical injunction insofar as it occupies the place of the Levinasian Other: a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving" (9). The revenants of Neo-Gothic fiction occupy the place of the Levinasian Other and demand, if not enforce, the preservation of their difference. As will become clear, the spectre or revenant presents a "wholly irrecoverable" ontology that cannot be subsumed into epistemologies of reason, despite the frantic attempts of characters to exorcise these others through empirical methods. For this reason, they are classified as 'evil'.

Disruptions of Being

Pivotal to Derrida's conceptualisation of spectrality is the notion of time and temporality, which marks the most obvious difference or otherness posed by the revenant. In this line, Hamlet's immortal exclamation, "the time is out of joint" (Shakespeare 1.5.189) receives considerable emphasis. Concepts of time and temporality are key organising principles in the metaphysics of presence, and time is characterised as a linear development that ensures

¹⁴ In an article on "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", Derrida explains that Western science and philosophy have been organised according to a structure (a metaphysics) that privileges presence as what it means 'to be' (225). This resulted, accordingly, in a "law of the central presence" that dominates the ways in which history and knowledge have been constructed in the Western paradigm (225). The simultaneous presence and absence of the spectre disrupts this metaphysics of presence by troubling the boundaries between presence and absence.

progress as it moves from one point to another. Time, Derrida suggests, is “*le temps*, but also *l’histoire*, and it is *le monde*, time, history, world” (*Specters* 21, his emphasis). In notions of ‘the end of history’ and the ‘perfection of humanity’, Derrida recognises the metanarratives that characterise Western metaphysics (*Specters* 16–17), which have converged on the idea of progress from a lesser state to a greater one.¹⁵ This conception is clear in the periodisation of history, the traditional concept of narrative as having a beginning, a middle and an end, and in the general notions of progress and teleology favoured in Western society. Derrida posits that, by virtue of existing (and not existing), spectres disrupt that notion of ‘normal’ time, which is utterly dependent on a sense of teleology, of having an identifiable beginning and an assured end. With this emphasis placed on time, linearity and progression, it becomes clear why Hamlet’s proclamation that the ‘time is out of joint’ was chosen as the catchphrase for Derrida’s hauntology. Just as King Hamlet’s ghost indicates that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”, so Derrida’s spectre becomes a sign of disruption and uncertainty that is meant to set the narrative in motion. For Derrida, the spectre is the mark that shows how time is “*disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged [...] run down, on the run and run down [...], *deranged*, both out of order and mad” (*Specters* 20, his emphasis). Thus, by virtue of its non-presence, the spectre shows that “Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted” (*Specters* 20).

The revenant is quite literally that which is out of time and defies time as well as the natural order. Where death is meant to put a stop to existence, the return of the dead marks a deeply unsettling and thoroughly unnatural turn of events. Furthermore, the spectre does not only represent the ateleological intrusion of the past onto the present, but also an intrusion of the “future-to-come” (Derrida, *Spectres* 46). The fear and disruption engendered by the appearance of the spectre prompt Derrida to conclude that, “[a]t bottom, the spectre is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back” (*Spectres* 48). As incomprehensible, indecipherable or unintelligible beings, revenants that cannot be defeated – in other words, exorcised from the present – always threaten to return and are therefore already a possibility and a representation of a future-to-come. In this sense, the revenant defies time and linear understandings thereof, and it is this quality that renders it monstrous and evil. According to Derrida, “[t]o be ‘out of joint,’ whether it be present Being or present time, can do harm and do evil, it is no doubt the very possibility of evil” (*Specters* 34). The revenant’s hauntology – its radical alterity furnished by the logic of haunting and its

¹⁵ Exactly what ‘lesser’ and ‘greater’ entail are dependent on the ideologies and discourses of any specific historical epoch, and as such vary greatly.

state of defying time, knowledge and being – disrupts understandings of the normal, natural or rational, and is therefore understood as evil.

Neo-Gothic revenants, like Derrida's spectre, exult in this confounding of time and being. The disruptions caused by the spectre form what Derrida terms "hauntology" or the "logic of haunting" (*Specters* 10). Hauntology, Derrida claims, supersedes its homonym 'ontology'. Whereas ontology is demarcated merely as ways of being, 'hauntology' transcends merely being because "[i]t would harbor within itself [...] eschatology and teleology themselves. It would comprehend them, but incomprehensively" (*Specters* 10). Hauntology thus posits the ultimate other in the form of the spectre, which haunts through its disruption of being by rupturing the 'proper' progress of time, which it encapsulates in dying but defies by coming back. It is itself a liminal 'thing' that defies easy categorisation other than just that – the unresolved, undetermined and uncertain Other. Derrida characterises the spectre as a

paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. [...] There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reappearance of the departed. (*Specters* 5)

The spectre, then, is a monster in the sense that Cohen uses the term: a metamorphosis of the spirit into that which defies its initial corporeal characteristics and confounds categorisation as dead or alive because it is both. The spectre maintains its liminality, refusing to concretise into either a 'normal' body or a complete spirit, and thereby flouts both teleology and the 'natural order'. As mentioned above, this is expressed in Neo-Gothic texts through the characterisation of the revenant as an evil Other, whose hauntology disrupts the grand narrative of progress by attacking and problematising the central binaries that inform this narrative.

Disruptions of Knowing

The spectre defies not only ontology, but also epistemology. Derrida explains:

It [the spectre] is something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. Here is – or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything, some thing, 'this thing,' but this thing and not any other [...] comes to defy semantics as much as ontology, psychoanalyses as much as philosophy. (*Specters* 5z, his emphasis)

These problems of knowing, categorising, naming and observing are taken up in Neo-Gothic fiction, in which the characters attempt to understand the revenant according to conventional Western epistemology. As discussed above, the narrators of Neo-Gothic fiction present themselves as chroniclers whose accounts record personal experiences with the revenant as though they were empirical observations.¹⁶ It is suggested that the empirical paradigm is the only method of understanding available to the narrators, who attempt to record their experiences so as to work through them or to convince others of the reality of the revenant (including the reader). However, due to the liminal nature of the revenant, the narrators are confounded by issues of naming, knowing and categorising. The idea that their tales are ‘unbelievable’ is unshakeable despite their efforts to convince their readers. As María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren suggest, “the ghost or the specter is seen to signify precisely that which escapes full cognition or comprehension”, and “the ghost, even when turned into a conceptual metaphor, remains a figure of unruliness pointing to the tangibly ambiguous” (“Conceptualizing Spectralities” 9). The only tools – empirical observation, record-keeping and reason – that characters of Neo-Gothic fiction have for relating and thereby conquering the revenant, are thus inadequate in the face of the revenant, who obstinately defies epistemology.

This, Derrida suggests, is an essential aspect of the revenant’s hauntology. In fact, Derrida encourages – as Blanco and Peeren state – that “the ghost should remain, be lived *with*, as a conceptual metaphor signalling the ultimate disjointedness of ontology, history, inheritance, materiality, and ideology” (“Conceptualizing Spectralities” 7). It is only within this disruption, Derrida ultimately concludes, that the call to justice can be sustained. In *The Specters of Marx*, Derrida is concerned with Marx’s legacy and particularly with the fact that the call to action – to act upon the injustices of the past – has been obscured by the concern with exorcising the past. According to Davis, this is why Derrida insists on the preservation of the radical disruption of ontology that is enacted by the spectre (147). Derrida explains that “heterogeneity opens things up, it lets itself be opened up by the very effraction of that which unfurls, comes, and remains to come – singularly from the other. There would be neither injunction nor promise without this disjunction” (*Specters* 40). In an interview with Bernard Stiegler, Derrida affirms this stance by stating that “As soon as one calls for the

¹⁶ *The Little Stranger* is slightly different in this aspect, as its narrator does not admit to any direct contact with the revenant. As will become clear in Chapter 2, this is because the narrator himself is the most likely source of the revenant, although he is seemingly not aware of his complicity. However, while the narrator of *The Little Stranger* uses second-hand accounts of the revenant to construct his narrative, he still presents himself as a chronicler who should be trusted because of the reason and logic of his approach, and empirical air of his narrative.

disappearance of ghosts, one deprives oneself of the very thing that constitutes the revolutionary movement itself, that is to say, the appeal to justice” (“Spectrographies” 123). It is this appeal to justice that is represented in the revenants of Neo-Gothic fiction as well as the living characters’ reactions to them.

The appearance of the revenant, then, disrupts the initial equilibrium of a rational, realistic world through its very being, which is classified as evil because of this disruption. As is shown in *Hamlet*, the appearance of the revenant signifies that “something is rotten”, in this case in the traditional notions of history, progress and civilisation or, collectively, the grand narrative of progress. In Neo-Gothic fiction, the ‘rottenness’ suggested by the appearance of the revenant is tied to History’s injustices – class differences, persecution, sexism and so forth – and thus the appearance of the revenant represents a call to justice. While the characters’ reactions to this appearance usually involve attempts to exorcise the revenant, the nature of the revenant defies these attempts. Its alterity is preserved in Neo-Gothic fiction, and the call to justice can thus not be ignored.

The Impulse to Exorcise: Abjection and Conjurement

However, the effort to conquer the ontology of the spectre through epistemology is, apparently, the ‘natural’ reaction of the modern¹⁷ Western subject. Scholars like Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Adorno and even other theorists in the area of spectrality like Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, all recommend the exorcism of ghosts. Two theoretical concepts aid in understanding this overwhelming impulse: Kristeva’s notion of the ‘abject’ and Derrida’s understanding of ‘conjunction’. While the conceptualisation of Derrida’s spectre can be related to several other theories, Kristeva’s ‘abjection’ provides interesting links to psychoanalysis and subject-formation that can usefully illustrate the effects of revenants in Neo-Gothic fiction. The concept of the abject has, of course, been tied to the Gothic before. Kristeva’s essay on the subject, *Powers of Horror*, makes such an association almost impossible to avoid, stocked as it is with images of horror and concentrating as it does on the effects of fear. Although it is not my intent to wander too deeply into the domain of psychoanalysis, Kristeva’s ‘abject’ reflects many of the elements and concepts discussed above, including notions of the primitive, the monstrous and, particularly, the disruption of

¹⁷ ‘Modern’ should here be understood as referring to the post-Enlightenment, secular subject whose ‘common sense’ based on the development of science and a greater understanding of physics precludes it from the kind of superstition required to believe in ghosts. As the ghost cannot be subsumed into a system of faith, it must be explained through a system of knowledge.

epistemology and ontology. Kristeva's theory captures the sense of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that is expressed in Neo-Gothic fiction's portrayal of revenants, and thus the abject will be used to augment my discussion of revenants in *The Little Stranger*, *The Historian* and *The Accursed*. Derrida's understanding of 'conjunction', which provides further explanation of the impulse to exorcise, will be discussed thereafter.

Spectral Abjection in Neo-Gothic Fiction

Kristeva opens *Powers of Horror* with an extended, enigmatic description of the abject:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful – a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside itself. (1)

The possible relations and parallels between Kristeva's abject and Derrida's spectre should be immediately apparent. Both the spectre and the abject disrupt through the manifestation of ineluctable liminality that simultaneously draws attention to boundaries and shatters them. The abject does, however, add another layer of nuance if applied alongside hauntology. Abjection, Kristeva explains, involves the process of separating the subject from that which surrounds it through an immediate, violent reaction elicited by disgust or fear (3). This reaction forces an attempt at purification, or a 'throwing off' of that to which the subject reacts – the abject. There is thus a tricky distinction to be made between 'the abject' and 'abjection'. As a noun, the abject in this context can be related to the Gothic – it is that which troubles and problematises. Abjection, on the other hand, is the process through which the abject is thrown off. *To abject*, the verb, is to throw off, to exorcise. However, in this process of abjection, the subject cannot truly 'throw off' the abject because it is part of the subject. Kristeva explains with the now famous example of food-loathing manifested in her reaction to a skin on milk: "since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' [...] I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). While abjection is a safeguard for the subject against the abject, Kristeva emphasises that one cannot escape the abject: it "beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire" (1) and is "a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives" (10). The abject violently and coercively impels engagement.

One of the main principles of the abject is its connection to what Kristeva calls “primal repression” (11), which she explains as “the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat” (12). Kristeva explains this by referring to how “primitive societies” have separated themselves from animals (12). The abject harkens and preserves “what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence in which the body becomes separated from another body in order to be¹⁸ – maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out” (10). The abject thus confronts the subject with what society has allocated to the ‘primitive’ – “those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*” (12). Culturally, abjection safeguards society from these ‘primal’ territories by forcing a disgusted reaction to the abject (2), but the threat of what they represent – rape, murder, sex, and so on – remains (4). “[W]hile releasing a hold,” Kristeva explains, “it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens [sic] it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (9). In Neo-Gothic fiction, this is exemplified by the threat revenants pose to the rational subject. Confronting them with the truth of what has been abjected as naive, ‘primitive’ superstition, the subject is forced to re-attempt that abjection. Its struggle is to remain in the ‘real’ realm, in which phenomena can be explained through rational means. The revenant threatens to drag the subject back into the primordial, irrational past and exposes the fragility of all the mechanisms society has created to separate the present from the past. The revenant thus shows the fragility of law, religion and, above all, the narrative of progress and its explanation of the world.

At the risk of contradiction, I wish then to suggest that the Neo-Gothic revenant is a spectralised form of the abject. It is wholly Other, as Derrida suggests, in its ontology and because it falls outside of the explanatory paradigms of knowledge and reason, but it is also that onto which ‘historical fear’ is abjected or ‘thrown off’. Therefore, despite its radical ontological alterity, the revenant still derives from the Western, rational subject who attempts to exorcise the past through progress and the advancement of ‘civilisation’. The revenant is abjected history that comes back to haunt the subject and to remind it of its chequered past. The revenants of Neo-Gothic fiction and Gothic fiction thus simultaneously disturb and reinforce the formation of the rational subject. The very indeterminability with which the subject is confronted forces an attempt at delineation by the superego, which exposes the fragility of the rational subject. Kristeva explains that it is not “lack of cleanliness or health

¹⁸ In other words, the “I” separating from the mother (McAfee 48).

that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (4). The abject “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). It is “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). The abject places the subject on “the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (3). It is exactly in this instance, Kristeva argues, that abjection should safeguard the subject by throwing off the abject. However, as Noëlle McAfee notes, “[w]hat is abjected is radically excluded but never banished altogether. It hovers at the periphery of one’s existence, constantly challenging one’s own tenuous borders of selfhood” (46). In Neo-Gothic fiction, the revenant poses this threat to selfhood and protagonists consequently desperately attempt to stave it off through rationalist means. The revenant thus threatens the integrity of the rational subject who cannot understand this defiance of teleology and nature. Empiricism is accordingly set the task of purification, of throwing the supernatural under the ‘light’ of categorisation, observation and record-keeping. However, in Neo-Gothic fiction, empiricism, logic and reason are shown to be inadequate tools, and the structures (borders and binaries) that serve to bolster the rational subject against the ‘primitive’, barbaric and regressive, threaten to crumble in the face of an irresolvable, unclassifiable revenant that haunts the present with the past.

Theoretical Exorcisms: Conjuring Evil

However, as is expressed in Kristeva’s theory and suggested by Derrida, the drive to subjugate the liminal to a rational, empiricist index that effectively conquers the abject or the spectre is built into Western society. Michel de Certeau supports this notion in his assertion that it has always been the task of the empiricist to facilitate the purge of ‘dangerous elements’ from “the social body” (227). In *Possession at Loudun* (1970), his study on the possession of several Ursuline nuns in seventeenth-century France, Certeau argues that the historian in particular has “received from society an exorcist’s task. He [sic] is asked to eliminate the danger of the *other*” (227, his emphasis). This is done, Certeau asserts, through the institution of historiography, which allows for society to successfully contain the Other in an academic paradigm. The role of historiography is to “prove that menacing alterity [...] is only a legend or a past, an eliminated reality” (227). By singling the Other out for study, classification and intense scrutiny, it is successfully ejected and isolated from ‘normal’ Western society (227). However, as Certeau also asserts, the “poison of the other” is marked in various forms, whether religious, political or social (228). In terms of Gothic and Neo-Gothic fiction, the Other is most obviously embodied in the supernatural, the monster or the Gothic villain, who stand as aberrant figures transgressing the norms of society. Certeau

suggests that the aberrant in society often takes the form of the diabolical, and that “[d]eviltries are at once symptoms and transitional solutions” (2) to problems that not only transgress societal norms and values, but threaten to shatter them through the erasure of certainty. These diabolical figures are abject – thrown off by society and purged from the ‘norm’ only to haunt the edges of that boundary with a constant threat of recurrence. They are never wholly exorcised or defeated. As Cohen argues, the “revenant by definition returns” (5).

The compulsion to exorcise has not changed, but the methods employed in the exorcism are a far cry from traditional, Judeo-Christian rituals. They have adapted to modern discourses of science, empiricism and scholarship, which aim to exorcise the demons of the past through understanding rather than divine power. That does not mean, however, that the act of exorcism has lost its sacred air. Derrida considers the compulsion to exorcise through a close analysis of the French word ‘*conjuración*’ (*Specters* 49). While the English homonym entails “the magical incantation destined to evoke, to bring forth with the voice, to convoke a charm or a spirit” (*Specters* 50), the French also means “‘conjurement’ (Beschworung), namely, the magical exorcism that, on the contrary, tends to expulse the evil spirit which would have been called up or convoked” (*Specters* 58). Therefore, exorcism becomes part of the “logic of conjuration” (Wang 207), and Derrida concludes that

to conjure means *also* to exorcise: to attempt both to destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force, most often an evil-doing spirit, a specter, a kind of ghost who comes back or who still risks coming back *post mortem*. Exorcism conjures away the evil in ways that are also irrational, using magical, mysterious, even mystifying practices. Without excluding, quite to the contrary, analytic procedure and argumentative ratiocination, exorcism consists in repeating in the mode of an incantation that the dead man is really dead. (*Specters* 59)

The ‘conjuración’ takes place both in the text and through the text, as the revenant is ‘conjured’ only to be dispelled in Gothic fiction. However, in Neo-Gothic fiction the revenant is conjured and its nature of always coming back is shown through the inability of both the characters and the text itself to dispel the monster. The exorcism, like Neo-Gothic protagonists’ attempts at recording their experiences, “proceeds by *formulae*, and sometimes theoretical *formulae* play this role with an efficacy that is all the greater because they mislead as to their magical nature, their authoritarian dogmatism, the occult power they share with what they claim to combat” (*Specters* 59). This is not to say that the exorcism is always effective, but that the belief in its power creates a sense of its being an adequate solution, with power that should match or be greater than that of the spectre. The formulaic nature of

the attempts at exorcism thus disguise the fact that empiricism is not so much a ‘scientific truth’ as an epistemological paradigm with limitations and shortcomings.

In this sense one can see hauntology and exorcism as discourses struggling on the Gothic cusp between those two forces that Coleridge identified in Scott’s work: the allure of the past and the drive toward the future. The struggle is, however, incessant, and manifests itself over and over in both popular fiction and ‘high’ literature. In Neo-Gothic fiction, the struggle is brought to the fore, but the past to be exorcised or abjected has shifted, and the future to which one is recommended to aspire has changed. ‘Regression’ is no longer associated with barbarity and hedonism in contrast to an advanced, civilized society. Rather – in what would today be considered progressive narratives – ‘regressive’ relates to ‘old prejudices’, injustices based on arbitrarily defined categories like gender and race and a lack of empathy for fellow humans, while ‘civilised’ is associated with civility and humanitarian values. However, these are shown to be ideals that humanity has not yet reached, contrary to contemporary grand narratives of progress that suggest the ‘end of history’ has been reached in, for instance, “victorious capitalism [and] liberal democracy” (Derrida, *Specters* 70). The mistrust of past and present grand narratives are thus illustrated in Neo-Gothic fiction through this struggle between past and present, even as the exorcism of the past is shown to be a never-ending human endeavour.

Neo-Gothic Fiction: a Working Definition

At this point it becomes possible and necessary to offer a definition of Neo-Gothic fiction. The texts under consideration in this thesis – *The Little Stranger*, *The Historian* and *The Accursed* – broadly fall under the label of ‘contemporary Gothic fiction’. However, it is my contention that texts like *The Little Stranger*, *The Historian* and *The Accursed* exhibit an identifiable strain of Gothic conventions, historical interests and attention to narratives of progress that distinguish them from the vast array of other contemporary Gothic texts. In my use of the term, which is primarily informed by the definitions of the Gothic and Gothic fiction as set out above by Chris Baldick, Robert Miles and David Punter, Neo-Gothic fiction denotes contemporary Gothic novels – in other words, novels that employ identifiably Gothic conventions – that are set in historical eras, exhibit concerns with history and historicism and that contain an obviously supernatural element. I have chosen to use the term ‘Neo-Gothic’ because these texts are contemporary Gothic fiction titles that reinvent the themes and structures of the original Gothic novels and the seminal works of Gothic fiction. As

mentioned above, Gothic fiction increasingly relaxed its interest in history and historical discourse as the genre developed, but these texts show a return to the concern with history and its influence over ‘modernity’. As such, these texts represent historical ‘Gothic cusps’ that illustrate the tensions and struggles between old and new, tradition and progress and the primitive and the civilised. While this is exhibited in their historical settings and their inheritances from their other parent-genre, historical fiction, I argue that the most potent manifestations of history in Neo-Gothic texts can be found in their revenants – the ghosts and vampires that haunt their narratives. Like its generic predecessors, Neo-Gothic fiction represents the threats posed to progress and ‘modernity’ through these evil supernatural beings, as well as the impetus to exorcise them through reason. The ‘struggle’ theorised in the Gothic cusp is acted out in the confrontation between the revenant and the ‘modern’ characters who attempt to record and exorcise what haunts them. In this struggle, a sense of “historical fear” is created, which is reflected in the reactions of the heroes and heroines to the evil revenants that haunt them.

As contemporary texts, however, they also embody in key ways the movements in literature up to the start of the twenty-first century, and are thus also clearly influenced by postmodern notions of epistemology, sociocultural issues and aesthetics. Therefore, their relationship to original Gothic novels and traditional historical fiction can be characterised as playful and revisionist. These texts furthermore employ conventions from various popular fiction genres in order to orchestrate a critique of the grand narrative of progress that characterises current conceptualisations of modernity, civilisation and history. Conventions are manipulated to depict a clash between Enlightenment epistemology and the hauntology of the revenant. In Neo-Gothic fiction, history and History literally haunt the text through the liminal and transgressive revenants. Their disruption, and the text’s representation of this disruption as well as its resolution (or not), attempts to revise historical discourses surrounding class, gender, race and morality, which are tied to a broader sense of the binaries that characterise Gothic, historical and Neo-Gothic fiction. In its representation of these facets, Neo-Gothic fiction addresses the concepts that inform the grand narrative of progress, and thereby problematises and critiques it. This is, however, a fine line to tread. While Neo-Gothic fiction has a revisionist inclination in its depiction of historical epochs from modern perspectives, it can also be seen as ‘mainstream’ in its popularity and commercial success. Thus, although Neo-Gothic fiction illustrates a drive for revision, the history it represents is, at times, glorified and romanticised, while the attempted revision can fade into the background of a ‘historical romance’. This thesis thus also aims to tease out the

contradictions and gaps in Neo-Gothic fiction's representation of history, the grand narrative of progress and modern, twenty-first century perspectives.

Chapter 2: Haunting in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger*

This chapter argues that the eponymous revenant that haunts Hundreds Hall in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger* is a manifestation of Britain's centuries-old class distinctions, as well as the anger, humiliation, hate and desire that these distinctions foster. Through her representation of the revenant in these terms, Waters problematises the Enlightenment narrative of progress by showing the tensions between tradition and progress. Paradoxically, these tensions are manifested in the haunting of an old family by a new supernatural force. Waters uses tropes from historical and Gothic fiction – particularly the traditional ghost story – to affect her problematisation of the narrative of progress. Her revisionist tale accomplishes this by representing a clash between the revenant's hauntology and the narrator's rationalist epistemology that maintains the uncertainty required of a postmodern ghost story. *The Little Stranger* thus presents a complex portrayal of the tensions between old and new that clearly demonstrates the interaction between Samuel Taylor Coleridge's two forces of wanting to preserve tradition and needing to advance progress. *The Little Stranger* accordingly focuses on the simultaneously destructive and liberating force of progress in its use as an exorcism of the old to the advantage of the new. This chapter investigates how Waters problematises the narrative of progress in three main ways: through her portrayal of 'the little stranger' and its hauntology, the orchestration of a Gothic cusp situated in post-war Britain, and an illustration of how the notions of progress and exorcism are intrinsically linked in *The Little Stranger* and its portrayal of class. The investigation necessitates a close reading of the character of Doctor Faraday, who is simultaneously the modern voice of reason attempting to exorcise the revenant through progress, and the unwitting source of the revenant itself.

Waters's fiction often takes on a revisionist imperative. Her oeuvre and background in academia translate into a keen awareness of historical discourse and consciousness. As Kaye Mitchell states, "Waters' novels are ripe for critical analysis because of their ambitious and insightful use of historical material and popular genres; they touch on topical themes of history, memory, trauma, sexuality, gender and class" (5–6). Her novels are known for their lesbian historical narratives which, Mitchell claims, can be seen as a continuation of the lesbian literary tradition sparked by authors like Jeanette Winterson (1). While *Tipping the*

Velvet (1998), her first endeavour, has been reductively described as a “bawdy lesbian picaresque novel” (Mitchell 1), critics also noted its use of “complex gender codes” (Gamble 135) and its subversion of heteronormativity (Kohlke 8–9). *Tipping the Velvet* established Waters as a popular success, but it was *Fingersmith* (2002) that propelled her into literary acclaim with a spot on the Man Booker Prize shortlist. Since then, Waters has been shortlisted twice more, for *The Night Watch* (2006) and *The Little Stranger*. Throughout her oeuvre, Waters employs her knowledge of literary texts and conventions to create postmodern, highly intertextual pastiches that cover “elements of sensation fiction, gothic fiction, the postwar middlebrow woman’s novel and the country house novel” (Mitchell 6). Ann Heilmann provides a useful summary of Waters’s key preoccupations as “neo-Victorian Gothic¹ [...] class relations [...] psychopathological sexualities [...] and the upheavals caused by war” (38–39). *The Little Stranger* continues in this vein, but is particularly concerned with class and social mobility.

The Little Stranger is narrated by Doctor Faraday, an upwardly mobile middle-aged man whose parents sacrificed what little money they possessed, as well as their health, to propel him out of the working class (Waters 38–39). Faraday, whose first name is not disclosed, narrates the events of his embroilment with the Ayres family, the owners of the once-great Hundreds Hall, and chronicles the mysterious circumstances surrounding their decline and ruin. Throughout the narrative, Faraday’s obsession with Hundreds Hall becomes an increasingly disturbing fact and his attempts to inveigle himself into the family’s lives are strongly linked to his class resentments and aspirations. Through his contact with the Ayreses, Faraday is allowed to ‘roam’ class boundaries (Braid 139). He switches between impulsive resentment of the upper-class Ayreses and a deep desire for Hundreds Hall. The text thus strongly suggests that Faraday is responsible for the entity, and this assumption will form a key part in my argument. His desire for the country house and anger toward its owners manifest in a spectral energy that haunts the Ayres family and eventually causes their destruction. However, Faraday is also the ‘voice of reason’ who repeatedly attempts to explain the revenant away by deferring to positivist logic. When confronted with superstitions, Faraday dismisses other characters’ experiences as irrational or psychological.

¹ Neo-Victorian fiction involves a self-aware engagement with Victorian fiction that reinterprets, rediscovers and revises many of the textual elements found in the older genre (Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism* 4). Neo-Victorian Gothic is thus close to what I describe as Neo-Gothic fiction in terms of its reinvention of past genres, but is too limited in its period of interest, does not always contain the supernatural and does not necessarily have the same concern with the grand narrative of progress. For these reasons, and due to my focus on novels that address twentieth-century conceptions of modernity, Neo-Victorian Gothic falls outside of the scope of this thesis.

This, despite the fact that Faraday is never present when the revenant strikes. Moreover, his entire narrative constitutes a second-hand chronicle that attempts to make sense of the experiences of others. By the end of the tale, Faraday's belief in empiricism is shaken, but undefeated. He eventually buys into the "rational view that Hundreds was, in effect, defeated by history, destroyed by its own failure to keep pace with a rapidly changing world" (Waters 498). This is, in fact, an accurate evaluation, but Faraday's simple summary of History as a natural progression brushes over the full scale of malevolence and destruction wreaked by the 'little stranger'. While Waters emphatically does not vilify the working and middle classes, *The Little Stranger* offers a complex portrayal of shifting class dynamics, which are played out in the interaction between Doctor Faraday, the Ayreses and the 'little stranger'.

The Little Stranger on the Gothic Cusp

Neo-Gothic fiction addresses the grand narrative of progress through its mix of Gothic and historical fiction conventions. In terms of *The Little Stranger*, these conventions are realised through the text's narrative situation, its depiction of historical detail and the creation of a malignant revenant who represents the past haunting the present. *The Little Stranger* can thus be firmly identified as Neo-Gothic fiction, as it exhibits the characteristics outlined in Chapter 1 and is fundamentally concerned with the portrayal and problematisation of History. Waters's novels are usually saturated with historical detail and intertextual references which, in the case of *The Little Stranger*, find expression in the evocation of rural Warwickshire in 1947 and the multiple references to Gothic and historical literature. As Katharina Boehm explains, *The Little Stranger* is "part social novel with an emphasis on realist detail and part psychological ghost story in the tradition of Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" (249).² The novel presents a Gothic cusp that foregrounds historical fears related to the effects and consequences of shifts in post-war British class dynamics. Waters's revision of the grand narrative of progress suggests that progress is not – as the grand narrative portends – a straight, peaceful line towards the 'end of history' and the betterment of humankind, but rather that this process of progress is fraught with violence, tensions and fear. This would suggest that, far from achieving greater

² The legion of other influences include both historical and Gothic fiction texts, such as Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), Josephine Tey's *The Franchise Affair* (1949), Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). It is argued that Waters's novel is particularly an attempt to 'write back' to *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Franchise Affair*, both of which present nostalgic portrayals of class relations and vilifications of the middle and working classes (Parker 100–101).

‘civilisation’ through progress, modernity is still fraught with the violence and turmoil of old. Revision is realised in the portrayal of Doctor Faraday, whose hunger for the status of the Ayres family and ‘outsider’-resentment towards their class illustrates the struggle between Coleridge’s two principles: a desire for the permanent and a need for progress. As both the rationalist narrator and the source of the revenant who haunts the Ayreses, Doctor Faraday is the essential element that brings together the tensions described above, and will thus be analysed in detail as the chapter progresses.

Hundreds Hall, A Great Good Place

Robert Miles identified his Gothic cusp in *Don Quixote*, which he suggests put an end to the Middle Ages and facilitated the “‘growing up’ [...] of modernity, progress and reason’s hegemony” (*Gothic Writing* 31). However, as he explains, the Gothic cusp can refer to any period when “the feudal and modern eras were understood to overlap” (*Gothic Writing* 214–215). Neo-Gothic fiction thrives on these “moments of fragmentation and disjuncture”, when traditional ideals are unravelled in the clash between old and new (*Gothic Writing* 214). Such a period can be identified in post-World War II Britain, when massive shifts were taking place in political, social and economic terms that reconfigured, to an extent, the make-up of British society. The power and influence of the old gentry were increasingly challenged by the rising middle and working classes (Walsh 40), while Britain itself was in a state of disrepair after the Second World War. During this time, relations and interactions between classes were being redefined, while notions of progress were readjusted in the wake of these shifts in power and meaning. Simon Hay suggests that these tensions between old and new fed off and sustained “that nagging sense [...] that wealth and lineage had become two competing standards of eminence or power, that rank and money had been cruelly dissociated from each other” (9). In the traditional British class structure, the upper, gentrified class was considered old, time-honoured and established as the ‘most important’ or ‘highest’ stakeholders of society, whose rank and lineage spoke for themselves. The bourgeoisie and proletariat, meanwhile, represented the ‘new’, rising classes at a time when the modernisations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increased social mobility. As the attitudes, behaviours and boundaries associated with these classes shifted, evaluations of worth were caught between the valorisation of the old and a rising appreciation and need for the new. It is in this context of shifting class dynamics that Waters sets *The Little Stranger*, when the normative ideals propounded by the hegemonic views of progress, class

and gender can be questioned and problematised at a moment of struggle between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’.

Central to this problematisation is how Waters’s traditional English country house setting. Hundreds Hall dominates *The Little Stranger* as site of struggle: it is at once the Ayreses’ defining possession and their downfall. For Doctor Faraday, it both represents his wildest dreams and desires, and recalls the suffering and humiliation endured by his mother while she worked as a nursemaid for the Ayreses. The Hall thus acts as historical backdrop, symbolic site of ‘old power’, and point of contact between the classes. Monica Germanà suggests that, through the juxtaposition of the aristocracy crumbling in the mansion and the rallying “mob” (Waters 190) at the park’s boundaries, “the novel outlines how social changes brought on by the war, the rise of a stronger middle- and working-class, are directly responsible for the collapse of that section of upper-class families unable to cope with such changes” (Germanà 118). Hundreds Hall, which was once a part of England’s great country house tradition and consequently represents a symbolic seat of power and ‘old values’ in the county (Walsh 75), is in shambles after the Second World War. *The Little Stranger* thereby evokes the decline of country houses and grand families in the wake of “[t]he radicalization of politics and progressive acts of parliamentary reform”, as well as industrialisation, in the late nineteenth century (Kelsall 155). The two World Wars of the early twentieth century accelerated the decline of English country houses and “shattered the last vestiges of feudal community and service” (Kelsall 155). The initial decline of Hundreds is attributed to various reasons stemming from the family’s crippling financial situation, which deteriorates steadily over the first half of the twentieth century (Waters 4, 34).

In establishing this Gothic setting of ruin and decay, Waters fills the narrative with realistic historical detail that relays the social and economic issues of the age. This is accomplished through references to how such social and political events as the austerity measures of the Attlee Labour Government (Waters 378), the incumbent implementation of a National Health Service (36) and, most prominently, the after-effects of the Second World War,³ affect the hall and its denizens. The ‘fall’ of the Ayres family and Hundreds Hall is thus caused not only by the destructive revenant that comes to haunt them, but also by the historical, economic and social changes in post-war Britain, which contribute to the physical and material decline of the grand house as well as to the diminished social capacity of the

³ *The Little Stranger* presents a portrayal of post-war trauma in the form of Roderick Ayres, who has suffered a grievous injury that contributes to his diminishment as an heir. In his capacity as the last male Ayres, Roderick also suffers under the further burden of responsibility for the preservation of Hundreds Hall, which is itself crumbling due to the Ayreses’ financial problems.

Ayreses. “The house thus functions not as a monument to its owners’ magnificence,” Emma Parker notes, “but [as] a symbolic reflection of the declining power of their class” (101). Through the mix of characters and the haunting that takes root in the Hall, Waters sets Hundreds up as a contested site where the historical issues of the epoch inform the struggle between characters of various classes. Hundreds Hall in 1947 is then the site of the Gothic cusp, where old norms clash with new ideals.

A Matter of Class: the Gothic Gentry and the Modern Mob

The gentry, represented in *The Little Stranger* by the Ayres family, are thus placed in the role of ‘Gothic’ characters.⁴ Their lifestyle and mere being threaten to dominate and curtail the advancement of the ‘modern’ characters in the form of the middle and working class inhabitants of the nearby village, Lidcote. The division is clearly shown in the depictions of the Ayreses as upper class, Doctor Faraday and his colleagues as middle class and Betty – Hundreds’ lone live-in servant – as well as Faraday’s patients, as working class. However, through the course of the novel the strict boundaries referenced at the outset crumble, as roles begin to shift and blur due to the historical changes of the time. These shifts in relations between classes are often characterised in terms of struggle in *The Little Stranger*. For instance, when much needed council houses for the poorer inhabitants of Lidcote are being built on Hundreds parkland, the “faint concussive clamour of the work, the calling of the men, a sudden tumbling of planks or poles” remind Caroline Ayres of the “sounds of battle” (Waters 284), and the demolition of the park wall is construed as a “breach” (Waters 189), while the site itself is described as “some grisly sort of wound” (244). The Ayreses often express a sense of being under attack from the encroaching ‘lower classes’, the landless “grubby businessmen like Babb” and the nouveau-riche like the Baker-Hydes who threaten old interests with ‘new money’ (152). However, Waters does not create a simple divide between ‘Gothic’ and modern, upper and lower class characters. Each character rather embodies within themselves the tensions identifiable on the Gothic cusp. The Ayreses, while portrayed with the arrogance and elitism associated with the aristocracy, increasingly become aware of the need to modernise, while both Doctor Faraday and Betty are entranced by the Ayreses and their privilege.

The struggle between old and new is thus realised in the warring needs and desires of the various classes. The Ayreses desperately clasp on to the decaying remains of their once

⁴ ‘Gothic’ here refers to the ‘eighteenth-century’ sense of the word as being synonymous with the old, the archaic and the regressive.

great legacy while lamenting their forced contact with “grubby businessmen”. Betty, who represents the emerging working class, suffers the humiliation of being an old-fashioned servant – complete with a frilly maid’s outfit that makes her want to die of shame (13, 83) – but is enchanted when Mrs Ayres allows her to try on golden slippers (316). Faraday, as the middle class representative, evinces the most sustained and complex set of tensions, which render him the embodiment of the post-war Gothic cusp in *The Little Stranger*. These warring needs and desires are thus related to class structures, to divisions of old and new, and to the distinctions made in Chapter 1 between Gothic and modern. The Ayreses, the last of a once-great family, are trying to preserve their lifestyle, which is dependent on the preservation of their country estate and its dominance, exclusivity and influence in and over the landscape. Faraday and Betty, on the other hand, clearly benefit from the progress towards a ‘new’ order that moves away from the power and influence of the country house to the provision of a sort of equality, which is represented by the success of the desperately needed council houses. On a social and historical level, the juxtaposition of country house and council houses represents the clash of Coleridge’s two forces. The haunting of Hundreds Hall, however, provides a more complex and nuanced depiction of these clashes that draws attention to the violence involved. The revenant serves to both manifest and exacerbate the tensions between the ‘Gothic’ and ‘modern’ characters, and throws the struggle on the Gothic cusp into sharp relief.

Faraday and the Haunting of Hundreds Hall

Boehm suggests that “[c]entral to [*The Little Stranger*’s] historical vision is the friction between [the] conflicting registers of realism and Gothic fantasy” (255). This is established through the character of Doctor Faraday, who presents both registers in his account of the haunting at Hundreds Hall. In Faraday’s desires and actions, a struggle between the old and the new is portrayed on several levels. In structural terms, Faraday can be seen as the villain whose actions disrupt the initial equilibrium of the text and whose spectre continues to frustrate attempts at the restoration of order. However, Faraday is not aware of the fact that the spectre stems from his subconscious, and thus maintains that the ‘little stranger’ must be a figment of the Ayreses’ imagination. As the narrator, Faraday provides and sustains the legitimating techniques in the text, but, due to the split in his ontology between rational

doctor and malicious spectre, he proves to be an unreliable source.⁵ This split in the character of Doctor Faraday is central to the orchestration of the Gothic cusp as well as to the expression of historical fear. The revenant is formed and seemingly fed by Faraday's historical fear (which in turn informs his desire for Hundreds Hall), while realising in rather brutal terms the historical fears of the Ayreses. Although it is not quite a revenant in traditional terms, as it is not a being returned from the dead, the 'little stranger' takes on the role of ghost in its movements, methods and – ultimately – its haunting of Hundreds Hall. This section will examine the formation and actions of the revenant as the "shadow-self" (380) or dark progeny⁶ of Doctor Faraday.

From the moment of his introduction to the house, Faraday exerts a negative influence over the Ayreses' fortunes. Although Caroline rightly suggests that their problems at the Hall drastically increase around the time Faraday becomes involved with the family through Betty, only the reader realises that the Hall's decline starts when Faraday visits the house as a boy. At this point, the Ayreses "still had most of their money" and "were still big people in the district" (1) – a fact marked by their hosting the Empire Day fête. At this occasion, a ten-year-old Faraday violently prises a stucco acorn off the wall.⁷ Although it cannot be said that Faraday alone is responsible for the Ayreses' decline, his act of vandalism is definitively associated with the start of their 'fall'. Faraday mentions that "[t]hat must have been the last grand year for Hundreds Hall, anyway" (4), and the following year's Empire Day fête is hosted elsewhere. Soon after, the family's firstborn daughter dies suddenly, and Faraday marks that "Hundreds had started its steady decline" (4). This decline is depicted on two levels. As mentioned above, the first level of decline is characterised in socio-economic and historical terms, and reflects the historical decline of country houses over the first half of the twentieth century. The second decline is situated on an uncanny and mysterious level that

⁵ Faraday never experiences the revenant, and only hears about the supernatural events at Hundreds Hall from the Ayreses and Betty. Caroline Ayres even remarks that the revenant only ever appears when Faraday is away from Hundreds Hall (Waters 320).

⁶ The associations of the 'little stranger' with 'progeny' is made clear in the text. When Dr Seeley calls this being a 'little stranger', he begs the question of what it would "grow into" (380). As Parker points out, 'little stranger' was once a common euphemism for a newborn child (105). The 'little stranger', the text suggests, is an infantile manifestation of Faraday's subconscious hate, anger and desire. Seeley's further explanation of the little stranger corroborates its infantile inability to control its emotions, as it is motivated by "all the nasty impulses and hungers the conscious mind had hoped to keep hidden away" (380). In this sense, the 'little stranger' can be understood as the offspring of Faraday's subconscious identity struggle.

⁷ The narrating Faraday even recalls his disappointment at the acorn being made of plasterwork instead of marble. The grandeur and wonder he associated with the house is, however, not damaged by the 'fake' acorn. To the contrary, this act forges a dark connection with the house that foreshadows the state in which Faraday will finally possess Hundreds Hall.

involves the domestic, personal and mental conditions of the Ayreses, and is caused by the revenant who slowly destroys the last vestiges of a once powerful family.

As mentioned above, however, the revenant is a product of Faraday's subconscious and is sustained by his historical fear. The 'little stranger' thus embodies the socio-historical factors that contributed to the fall of the Ayreses: it manifests the hatred, anger and desire fuelled by class distinctions that factored into these socio-historical changes. Faraday's boyhood act of vandalism is closely tied to his feelings of class resentment and the covetousness he expresses toward the hall. It is significant that his attempt to possess a piece of the house initiates a process of deterioration. When he revisits Hundreds thirty years later, he sees "with dismay that a horde of schoolboy vandals might have been at work on the plaster since my first attack on it, for chunks of it had fallen away, and what was left was cracked and discoloured" (18). The disruption of the hall's physical integrity thus parallels the historical and social decline of its family, and Faraday's vandalism can therefore be seen as an attack that brings to bear centuries of class unrest.

This attack is rendered the more disturbing by Faraday's obvious infatuation with the house and his desire to *possess* it. Even at this point, he covets the Hall and its treasures:

It was simply that, in admiring the house, I wanted to possess a piece of it – or rather, as if the admiration itself, which I suspected a more ordinary child would not have felt, entitled me to it. I was like a man, I suppose, wanting a lock of hair from the head of a girl he had suddenly and blindingly become enamoured of. (Waters 3)

Faraday's 'conquest' resumes when he returns to the hall as an adult. By this time, he has transcended his working class background to become a doctor, and is called to the Hall to diagnose the teenage servant, Betty. After this reestablishment of contact between Faraday and the inhabitants of Hundreds Hall, his boyhood enchantment with the house only grows. He muses that "if the house, like an oyster, was at work on Betty, fining and disguising her with layer after minuscule layer of its own particular charm, then I suppose it had already begun a similar process with me" (73). He gains continued access to the Hall by offering to help treat the son, Roderick, who has been injured during the war. Through his treatment, Faraday becomes more and more involved with the family, to the point that he sees himself as an integral part of life at Hundreds Hall. After the hall is nearly burned down from a fire started in Roderick's room, and Faraday only hears of it through the rumour mill, he writes: "It seemed impossible to me that the family could have gone through such an ordeal and not sent me word of it" (209). As his embroilment with the Ayreses becomes deeper, so does his sense of entitlement. Faraday feels a sense of kinship with Hundreds, and he aligns himself

with the Hall against the Ayreses.⁸ Often, he muses that “[t]he house [...] didn’t deserve their bad feeling; and neither did I” (188). Faraday’s unreliability as a narrator, his role in the downfall of the Ayreses and the dramatic irony Waters employs to make him seem suspect work together to enhance *The Little Stranger*’s Gothic status. Faraday does not realise that his own ill-feeling, his resentment, shame and humiliation, formulates itself into a malicious energy that takes up residence in Hundreds Hall.

Faraday, in other words, can be seen as a ‘conjurer’ in the sense that Jacques Derrida describes in *The Specters of Marx*. As explained in Chapter 1, Derrida examines the French noun ‘*conjuración*’ for its varied meanings and suggests that it presents several relevant nuances. This thesis is particularly interested in his description of conjuration as a magical incantation that evokes or “bring[s] forth with the voice” (50) a charm or a spirit, and in its sense as ‘conjurement’ or “*Beschwörung*” (58), or the magical exorcism that “tends to expulse the evil spirit” (58). Faraday is a conjurer in both senses. As the narrator of this tale, he ‘conjures’ *The Little Stranger*, and – although this does not involve a deliberate act – Faraday himself conjures, brings into being, the ‘little stranger’ that comes to haunt Hundreds Hall. Moreover, his account, in its empirical approach and rationalisations, also functions as that “magical exorcism” (58), or what Derrida otherwise calls the impulse to “*exorc-analyze* the spectrality of the specter” (58, his emphasis) by attempting to both “destroy and disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force” (59). This sort of exorcism through analysis and classification is the only possible recourse in Faraday’s positivist epistemology, which denies the existence of that which the observer has not seen or experienced. His reactions to the evidence of supernatural activity immediately fall back on scientific, medical and psychological paradigms. As explained in Chapter 1, Derrida suggests that ‘*exorc-analysis*’, which presents rational epistemologies as all-encompassing and which triumphantly declares their veracity – works through the same sort of ‘occult’ power associated with the spectre. The formulae by which rationalist thought works, Derrida suggests, are no different from that which they combat – the magical, mysterious or unknown – because they possess their own ‘occult’ power. This power lies in the absolute empiricist belief in the effectiveness of science – formulae – to dispel the darkness of ignorance. The analytic procedure and argumentative ratiocination thus works by the same faith and belief that humans put in superstition. They therefore exhibit their own “authoritarian dogmatism” (*Specters* 59) that

⁸ The characterisation of the house as a sentient force complicit in the haunting is something *The Little Stranger* inherits from the American haunted house tale. Dale Bailey suggests that the idea of the sentient house was first introduced and developed by Edgar Allan Poe in “The Fall of the House of Usher” and Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The House of the Seven Gables* (23).

precludes any other understanding of events, even when they present inadequate explanations. Exorcism is achieved not by the actual rational explanation, but by the stolid *belief* in that explanation.

This is exemplified in Faraday's account, which continually attempts to explain the 'little stranger' away through rationalisations. This is despite the fact, as Hilary Mantel points out in her review of *The Little Stranger*, that his "ever more tortured 'rational explanations' for bizarre events [...] require us to be more imaginative and gullible than if we simply accepted the supernatural" (para. 6). This is central to Waters's portrayal of a Gothic cusp. It is his tale – his "appeal that causes to come forth with *the voice*" (Derrida, *Specters* 50, his emphasis) – that conjures the moment of struggle,⁹ while his rationalisations as the narrator and empirical 'observer' attempt to exorcise the "trouble" (Waters 331) at Hundreds Hall. Faraday thus presents a sort of Jekyll and Hyde character: he is both the source of the revenant and its most fervent gainsayer. He is seemingly unaware of the fact that the revenant is fuelled by his emotions and resentments, and rather swears by the rational explanations that become increasingly inadequate. The following section will consequently investigate Doctor Faraday's character and how it portrays the Gothic cusp in *The Little Stranger*. Faraday functions in three significant ways: first, he is the 'voice of reason' who represents modern epistemologies; second, he conjures the spectre into being through his subconscious class resentment; and third, he provides the 'conjurement' – the exorcism – of the 'evil' manifested at Hundreds Hall, which is situated not in the vengeful revenant, but in the oppression symbolised by the Ayres family and their legacy.

Faraday, Voice of Reason

The Little Stranger's narrative situation presents an ostensibly empirical memoir that chronicles the fall of Hundreds Hall. As its narrator, Faraday renders himself as a knowledgeable and apt chronicler, whose tale presents the facts as he has experienced them and the 'evidence' as he has collected it. To this effect, the narrative is written in the first-person, and though it contains a flashback to Faraday's childhood, it appears to recount recent events fresh in the memory of its narrator. Nothing is given away and the narrative develops chronologically and systematically, from the moment of Faraday's first contact with the house to the complete demise of the Ayreses and his eventual 'custodianship'. It also has a strong sense of curation about it, as each chapter definitively establishes and completes the description of a particular incident in the string of events. It is only in the last chapter that

⁹ By this I mean that Faraday brings the Gothic cusp into being through his narration.

Faraday reveals the span of time that has passed between his narrating and experiential selves: three years (Waters 494). The rest of the narrative is presented with such historical detail as to faithfully recreate 1947, so that the reader's suspension of disbelief – concerning the historical setting – remains intact. In order to create this effect, Waters uses the conventions of historical fiction to establish a trustworthy narrator who seemingly depicts a 'true' historical environment. Faraday faithfully describes the clothes, manners and language of the era, and often makes reference to particular historical details that evoke an unquestionable sense of post-war Britain.

His account is thus construed as a straightforward explanation that presents his 'objective' observations alongside passionate expressions of feelings. Mantel suggests that "[e]very ghost story needs a Dr Faraday, a blunt literalist with a sturdy sense of self. Such a figure begins as the reader's surrogate, the voice of scepticism" (para. 6). This establishes him, at first, as a trustworthy guide through the mystery of Hundreds Hall. Faraday's rationalisations of the supernatural events about which he is told initially seem like the logical explanations a reader might suggest. Every material manifestation of the 'little stranger' – the phantom Ss, the nightly telephone calls from no one, the self-ringing servants' bells and the shenanigans of an old speaking tube – is explained through logical, clear, common sense that draws on mechanical and technological assumptions. In terms of the actual encounters with the revenant that are described to him, Faraday immediately assumes some form of psychological disruption, and psychological explanations – such as psychoneurosis, mental disorders and severe stress – are provided to explain the Ayreses' experiences away as delusions or hallucinations. As Boehm suggests "Faraday's sober rationalism collides again and again with the mysterious events at Hundreds Hall and the more esoteric theories of its inhabitants" (252). Doctor Faraday, it seems, has an answer for everything.

Faraday's position is understandable. He is foremost a 'modern-day' doctor, a classification that brings with it empiricism and science as his chief epistemologies. Upon being confronted by Caroline with the possibility of a spectre, he exasperatedly claims, "I see what's in front of me [...]. Then I make sensible deductions. That's what doctors do" (353). Even when he has his doubts, the doctor maintains a rational approach. This relentless application of rational epistemologies to irrational events marks Faraday as a positivist who "exorc-analyze[s]" (Derrida, *Specters* 58) the spectre. His constant dismissal of esoteric theories as nonsense and his barely adequate rationalisations attempt to "destroy and disavow" the affects of the "evil-doing spirit" (Derrida, *Specters* 59). Faraday's concern is ostensibly to protect the Ayreses from this sort of superstitious "nonsense" (Waters 365)

because he fears that it would encourage their delusions (366). Thereby his exorcism “pretends to declare the death [of the spirit]” – in other words, the impossibility of the spirit – “only in order to put [it] to death” (Derrida, *Specters* 59). Faraday repeats, over and over again, that the idea of a spirit haunting Hundreds Hall is ludicrous in order to convince the Ayreses of its impossibility. By doing this, he is effectively ‘killing’ the revenant by pronouncing its ‘death’ or, in this case, its impossibility to begin with. However, the exorcism is only an “impotent gesticulation, the restless dream, of an execution” (60) because, as will become clear, the abject spectre – a result of Faraday’s own psyche – takes on the monstrous qualities of always returning and thereby defying attempts at exorcism. This does not, however, rob Faraday of the impulse to rationalise. Because he is unaware of the fact that the revenant stems from his own feelings, he continues to believe in the power of rationalisation and the efficacy of exorcism.

In other words, Faraday is a thoroughly ‘modern’ character, who employs modern – read, Enlightenment – thought to make sense of the world. His rational, positivistic approach sufficiently explains the events at Hundreds Hall, except for the fact that he does not witness the haunting for himself, and the reader is steadily encouraged to doubt both his capacity and his trustworthiness as narrator. On the one hand, then, Faraday symbolizes the ‘modern man’ – a product of the Enlightenment who propounds reason and advancement. This is represented in his status as a doctor, his attempts to get ahead in his career by obtaining richer clients or by initiating medical trials that will stand him in good stead (Waters 40), and his obstinate rationalism in the face of uncanny events. His social mobility, also, marks him as a modern character. Faraday recognises his ticket to Hundreds Hall and the British aristocracy in Caroline, whom he attempts to ‘fashion into’ what he understands to be a suitable wife (Germanà 124). He does not realise, however, that his patriarchal attempts at taking possession through marriage will be resisted by Caroline, and that they pale in comparison to the lengths to which his spectral self would go to assume possession of the hall. It is Faraday’s status as a modern character that blinds him to the affects and actions of his ‘shadow-self’, which defies everything Faraday holds in his rationalist epistemology to formulate itself into a force that can invade and influence Hundreds Hall.

Faraday, Conjuring the Revenant

As has been argued, the revenant of Neo-Gothic fiction can be seen as a manifestation of historical fear. In the case of *The Little Stranger*, the revenant manifests the desires and resentments, based on class distinctions, of Doctor Faraday. As such, Faraday abjects his

historical fear onto the revenant. At first, the supernatural events at Hundreds Hall seem like a string of unfortunate accidents, but as Faraday explains to Doctor Seeley, the “*cumulative* nature of it all” (377) is troubling. However, the nature of the phenomenon becomes clear as the tale progresses, and is first explained by Caroline who researches the subject in what Faraday dismisses as “lurid books. Crank stuff” (379).¹⁰ She suggests that the presence in Hundreds Hall is a sort of psychological schism caused by “some sort of energy, or collection of energies. Or something inside us” (364), which manifests the “[u]nconscious parts, so strong or troubled they can take on a life of their own” (364). This concept of the revenant is expanded on by Doctor Seeley, who suggests that “[a] sort of *shadow-self*, perhaps a Caliban, a Mr Hyde” breaks off from the “dark, unhappy corners” of the “conscious mind” (380, her emphasis). This ‘creature’, he suggests, is “motivated by all the nasty impulses and hungers the conscious mind had hoped to keep hidden away: things like envy, malice, and frustration” (380). This supports Jerrold E. Hogle’s explanation that Gothic and Neo-Gothic fiction presents in abjection those aspects of our beings that are “‘thrown off’ onto seemingly repulsive monsters or ghosts” (“Ghost of the Counterfeit” 498) and Julia Kristeva’s explanation of abjection. As stated in Chapter 1, she claims that the abject “[u]nflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside itself” (1). In this case, Faraday can be said to be the haunted, since he causes the haunting only because he is himself haunted by historical fear. That which Faraday places “literally beside [him]self” is a deep sense of class resentment and a desperate class aspiration, which create conflicting emotions of hate and desire manifested in the form of the ‘little stranger’.

The supernatural events in *The Little Stranger* are closely tied to Faraday’s emotions, and the ‘little stranger’ exerts influence in the house whenever he experiences particularly heightened emotions of frustration, anger or embarrassment. These feelings are caused when attention is drawn to his class status and when either his masculinity or refinement is brought into question. As his attachment to the house grows, so does the strength of the ‘little stranger’, which manifests itself in ever more material and harmful ways, and starts to ‘pick off’ the Ayreses as each poses a threat to Faraday’s possession of the Hall. The revenant of

¹⁰ The explanations found in these books ironically provide a more fitting rationale. Both Caroline and Doctor Seeley suggest that supernatural phenomena might just be ‘undiscovered’ science, or something for which no explanation has *yet* been found. They suggest that this does not mean that supernatural phenomena are nonsense, but rather that science has not yet become advanced enough to explain the supernatural. This clashes with Faraday’s epistemology which, in its rationalising totalisation, throws off whatever does not fit into its scientific and medical paradigms as superstitious nonsense. Ironically, this utter dismissal suggests that the modern Faraday is narrow-minded and backward, as opposed to progressive and willing to explore the possibilities.

The Little Stranger's hauntology can then be characterised in the following terms: it presents a liminal being who is neither present nor absent, spirit nor body, and in so being disrupts notions of knowing and being to call attention to the injustices that transpire in the name of progress. The insinuation that the 'little stranger' is caused by a breaking off of something from Faraday's psyche suggests that the revenant disrupts his ontology by transgressing the boundaries of his 'normal' being. Faraday's rational epistemology cannot account for this rupture of being, and thus the hauntology of the spectre calls into question the Enlightenment thought that sustains his epistemology. Its hauntology – formed and driven by historical fear – manifests, on the one hand, the injustices of a rigid class structure and, on the other, the problems of notions of progress, which are expressed in the revenant's violent destruction of the Ayres family.

The revenant's actions are sparked by Faraday's feelings of anger, discontent and frustration, which are often elicited by class resentment. He is keenly aware of his station in life and the fact that his parents sacrificed their health and happiness, not to mention their money (which is, for Faraday, a condition of happiness), on his education. However, as Germanà suggests, what was supposed to "facilitate his climb up the social ladder, [...] leaves him, in fact, in an uncomfortable liminal position" (118). Faraday explains this to Caroline when he says: "[t]hey paid a small fortune for my education, and all I learned was that my accent was wrong, my clothes were wrong, my table manners – all of it, wrong. I learned, in fact, to be ashamed of them" (Waters 250). Faraday is uneasy in his position as a doctor because he knows that his class background counts against him. Unlike his friend, Doctor Graham, who "entered the practice as a doctor's son, with money and standing behind him" (35), Faraday is the son of a nursemaid and a grocer who is constantly afraid of being thought of and treated as "a sort of rustic booby" (263). He is aware of his liminality when he states: "they've never been able to place me [...]. I'm not grand enough for the gentry – not grand enough for working people, come to that. They want to look up to their doctor. They don't want to think he's one of them" (36).¹¹ At this point, Faraday is also troubled by the Ayreses' attitude towards the working and middle classes. Their statements cause the "peasant blood" in him to rise (27), and he feels affronted by their snobbery and self-pity when he compares their situation to the living conditions of his poorer patients, which are often damp, lack proper sanitation and expose them to sickness (250). Faraday is obviously concerned about the effects of class inequality, but as the novel progresses he also starts to adopt the snobbery

¹¹ This causes Faraday considerable concern over the impending National Health Service, which he fears will cost him all his patients and profit (36).

and elitism evinced by the Ayres, and poises himself to enter the British aristocracy by marrying Caroline.¹² As Barbara Braid mentions, it becomes a point of pride for Faraday that “within the span of time of one generation the same blood which used to be the Ayreses’ servants turns into their friend, confidante, and later even a kin-to-be” (140). It can be said that he is in the throes of a class identity struggle that encapsulates the rife tensions between old and new. Faraday, a ‘modern’ character seemingly supportive of progress, is enticed by the old in the form of Hundreds Hall. His admiration for this bastion of the British aristocracy fuels his aspirations for social mobility. As Braid suggests, becoming a doctor, which in itself is a sign of social mobility for Faraday, is not quite good enough for him (140).¹³ Instead, Faraday does his utmost to transcend both class and blood in order to become the ‘master’ of Hundreds Hall.

Hay suggests that the British ghost story is fundamentally concerned with this sort of climb and the identity issues experienced by the middle class (5–7). As they play out the “traumatic transition [...] from feudalism to capitalism lived out over and over again” (2), ghost stories often focus on “commoners” (2) moving into or onto aristocratic properties. He explains that:

The ghost story is [...] concerned with articulating a middle-class identity in distinction from both the working-class that it depends upon but renders invisible, and the landed gentry that it is simultaneously replacing and becoming absorbed into, and at different moments and in different ways the ghost functions as marking middle-class anxieties about its identity formation in either or both of these directions. (9)

In *The Little Stranger*, this concern is obvious in the depiction of Faraday, whose middle-class status continuously informs his interactions with other characters, and whose feelings of anger and inadequacy directly fuel the revenant. Waters creates a complex depiction of Faraday’s vacillating character, which switches between a sense of connection to the ‘lower’ classes and a deep and driven desire to transcend his own class even further. While the rational side of Faraday sees the need for progress, which the text suggests necessitates the decline of families like the Ayreses, he is also consumed with desire for the old, and harbours a deep respect for tradition and structure.¹⁴ However, he is keenly aware that he does not

¹² Later, the mere sight of Caroline working hard – a regular occurrence – comes to inspire an irrational rage in Faraday. However, he is not bothered by her working, but rather by the fact that she looks “like a servant, a plain Cinderella” (312).

¹³ Faraday sees himself as a “good, ordinary doctor” who might have achieved more if he had not started working with debts that crippled his progress and ability to generate income (Waters 39).

¹⁴ The suspicion of the new and trust of the old is instilled in Faraday through various means. He tells Caroline of when he first qualified as a doctor, when his father bought him “a fine new leather bag” (268) that his mentor, Dr Gill, immediately dismissed. Faraday explains: “Gill took one look at it and said I wouldn’t get anywhere

belong to the old, that – as the child of working class parents who recently joined the middle class – he is as new as it gets. His warring desires, needs and anxieties cause a part of his subliminal self to split off and become a spectral manifestation of his anger, resentment and, most dangerously, his aspirations. The ‘ghost’ of Hundreds Hall thus functions as an abjection of Faraday’s class hostilities and becomes, paradoxically, the most powerful marker of his class anxiety.

These anxieties about class are directly tied to senses of historical fear as Chris Baldick describes it. The ‘little stranger’ manifests the historical fear that Faraday abjects, and expresses its link to history in the fact that something *new* – ‘the little stranger’ – comes to haunt the *old* – the Ayreses and Hundreds Hall. This reversal of the traditional progression renders the revenant a sign that the “time is out of joint” (Shakespeare 1.5.189), and paradoxically proves that Faraday, who conjures this “new thing” (Waters 130), remains haunted by the old class structures just as, it is suggested, Britain remains haunted by its history of class distinctions despite the changes wrought by the World Wars. The history of class structure and oppression thus formulates itself into the ‘little stranger’, which haunts the symbolic site of the ‘old’ power at Hundreds Hall. If historical fear focuses on “the memory of an age-old regime of oppression and persecution which threatens still to fix its dead hand upon us” (Baldick xxi), then the ‘little stranger’ acts as the ‘shadow agent’ who loosens the grip of that hand by “culling” (Kelsall 155) those who pose this threat to Doctor Faraday. Whenever resistance to Faraday’s class mobility is manifested, the ‘little stranger’ starts its “mysterious tricks” (Waters 304) in the house. This happens often because, of course, Faraday encounters resistance based on his class and status.¹⁵ While he sees himself as an integral part of the family, and to an extent has managed to inveigle himself into a relationship with the Ayreses, his involvement is questioned on several occasions, and the revenant soon after strikes.

In manifesting the class hate, anger and frustration caused by centuries of oppression in a violent campaign against the Ayreses, the revenant then also realises the historical fears of the gentrified family. Although it is a product of Faraday’s psyche, its actions actualise the fears expressed by the Ayreses on several occasions. That which they fear – the rise of the

with a thing like that, no one would trust me. He gave me a battered old bag of his own. I used it for years” (268).

¹⁵ First, and most assiduously, Faraday’s presence is resisted by Roderick, who presents perhaps the most outspokenly snobbish and elitist member of the family. He is often vocal about the turning of tides, when what he thinks of as the shame of the “ordinary hard-working Englishman who since the war has had to watch his property and income vanishing like so much smoke” (152) becomes more prevalent. Here, Roderick is referring to himself and his peers – sons and heirs to old estates.

primitive ‘mob’ against their more ‘civilised’ way of life – comes to haunt them in the form of the ‘little stranger’. The “tyranny of the past” (Baldick xix), in this case the tyranny perpetrated by the upper class gentry against their servants, is channelled into Faraday’s conjuration of the revenant, which thereby realises the anxieties these tyrannies generate in the tyrants. Through this sustained campaign, the revenant brings about the “Ayres family taint” (399) – a rumour of madness that seems proved when it appears as though both Mrs Ayres and Caroline commit suicide, while Roderick whiles away the rest of his life in a county asylum (395). For the Ayres family, who project an image of being “better and braver than ordinary people” (399), these rumours of madness cause more damage than the actual destruction of individual members, because they call into question the quality and supremacy of the Ayreses’ blood. Thus the rumours, which are elicited by the Ayreses’ reactions to the revenant’s slowly mounted attack, destroy the Ayres legacy and credibility. Therefore, the revenant created by Doctor Faraday and sustained by his own historical fear, haunts the Ayreses by realising *their* historical fears. The tensions between the classes, and the fears these tensions elicit, are thus bound up in the manifestation of the revenant, whose hauntology presents a disruptive force that marks “a future-to-come as much as a past” (Derrida, *Specters* 19). The ‘little stranger’ manifests past injustices based on Faraday’s resentment, but also haunts the Ayreses with the future-to-come – the destruction and fall of the old in favour of the new.

The Haunting of Hundreds Hall

The spectre haunts the Ayreses by slowly attacking their weaknesses, which are based on their own fears and feelings of inadequacy as they relate to class and gender. As Caroline surmises “the house knows all [their] weaknesses and is testing them, one by one” (353). These weaknesses are bound by each character’s relation to Hundreds Hall, and touch on broader social issues that form part of Waters’s revisionist drive, as each character is expected to fulfil a specific gender role concomitant with their class role. Roderick’s weakness lies in his inability to perform as the male heir to an established great dynasty seated at Hundreds Hall. The house itself becomes his weakness (353), and he is taunted by its accelerating decay. Mrs Ayres’s weakness lies in the loss of her *first* child, Susan, and her inability to love and therefore ‘mother’ her younger children equally, so that they may be good inheritors and custodians of the hall. Caroline’s weakness is located in her desire to escape her ‘birthright’ and live a simpler and single life away from Hundreds. These weaknesses relate to issues of class, gender and motherhood, and are exploited by the

revenant until it gains power over and eventually destroys each member of the family, paving the way for the middle-class doctor to become a sort of custodian of the hall he covets. The house also obviously becomes complicit in their downfall. The symbol of a once great power, it is transformed by the twin forces of socio-historical developments and the influence of the 'little stranger' into the vehicle for the Ayreses' destruction. As well as falling apart and literally decaying, Hundreds becomes the "dead-end of physical incarceration" in the form of the "confinements of a family house closing in upon itself" that Baldick emphasises in his definition of Gothic fiction (xix). The Hall is rendered abject through the influence of the revenant (who also represents socio-historical forces of change and progress), but – in the links forged between Faraday, the revenant and Hundreds Hall – an abjection of the Ayres family is performed. They are cast off and destroyed by this triad of elements: Doctor Faraday as the source, the revenant as the agent and the house as the site of their destruction. Thus, the Ayreses, and not the revenant, are slowly exorcised.

The spectre, then, serves to break down class boundaries, but it only achieves this through destruction and cruelty. The 'little stranger' preys on the Ayreses' darkest fears and insecurities, and when this does not work, it bluntly destroys them. This is shown when Caroline, the last surviving Ayres – and heir – rejects Faraday and breaks off their engagement, and subsequently dies on what would have been their wedding night. It is only with this final eradication – which leaves Hundreds unsold and abandoned, that the spectre finally seems satisfied. Faraday finally 'obtains' the Hall in a sort of custodianship of its splendid decay (Waters 497). He decides that

In some ways it is handsomer than ever, for without the carpets and the furniture and the clutter of occupation, one appreciates the lines and Georgian symmetries, the lovely shifts between shadow and light, the gentle progression of the rooms. Wandering softly through the twilight spaces, I can even seem to see the house as its architect must have done when it was new, with its plaster detail fresh and unchipped, its surfaces unblemished. In those moments there is no trace of the Ayreses at all. *It is as if the house has thrown the family off*, like springing turf throwing off a footprint. (498, my emphasis)

This glorious transformation of Hundreds Hall, which becomes 'as good as new' in its decay, gives the impression that a sort of purging was necessary to restore the Hall to its former glory. It is suggested that Faraday held the Hall as a bastion of civilisation (in terms of class and success) and beauty, while the family whose blood was supposed to make them better disappointed him by failing to take care of the old site of power. However, the ruinous state of the house problematises Faraday's victory: the threat of the aristocracy is eradicated, the bourgeoisie is free to roam the castle halls, but the house is still in decay and Faraday is still

enraptured – haunted – by its splendour. The Ayreses are thus abjected, destroyed and exorcised, only so that the old may be claimed by the new.

The haunting of Hundreds Hall thus depicts a complex representation of a cycle of progress based on post-war class dynamics. If, as I argue, the revenant manifests Faraday's historical fears and desires, it can remove obstacles to these fears and desires in a manner that an empirical, reasonable man could not. Everything that the 'little stranger' does works to the eventual benefit of Faraday and avenges his wounded ego. It enforces 'progress' by exorcising the old in the form of the Ayreses, and allows for Doctor Faraday to gain possession of the house he covets. Waters's criticism of the narrative of progress lies in the fact that this is all accomplished not through gradual evolution of the working and middle class, but through the violent and destructive exorcism of the upper class. The notion of smooth, peaceful progress is brought into question, not least by the fact that the 'modern' character becomes so haunted by the 'Gothic' that he himself becomes a Gothic character. Through his conjuration of the revenant, his complicity in the decline of the house and the destruction of the Ayreses, Faraday becomes a Gothic villain. By the end of the novel, he is depicted as roaming a ruinous Hundreds Hall on "solitary visits" (Waters 498), and his role as the source of the revenant is revealed in the dramatic irony of the last words. Faraday at times senses "a presence" (499), and imagines that he will see the spectre that haunted the hall, but when he turns he only finds his own reflection in a mirror (499). Faraday is thus confirmed as the (still oblivious) source of the revenant and, consequently, the source of the Ayreses' exorcism. In other words, Faraday participates in the struggle between old and new, and his conjuration of the revenant affects the 'progress' needed in a post-war British society while preserving a desire for the permanent, which Faraday locates in the bare bones of Hundreds Hall.

Conjurement: Exorcism through Progress, for Progress

Apart from Faraday's 'exorc-analysis' of the spectre, which serves to maintain the revenant's liminal nature by casting doubt onto its ontology, Faraday also "conjures away" (Derrida, *Specters* 59) or exorcises the Ayreses. His abject energy becomes an evil Other that slowly wreaks destruction on an ancient family in the name of progress, particularly Doctor Faraday's progress. Significantly, then, Faraday and his shadow-self go against tradition and exorcise the aristocratic family instead of the revenant. This exhibits the reversal in Neo-

Gothic fiction of traditional Gothic outcomes. Hay notes that ghost stories often close the gap between the gentry and the commoners “by engineering an aristocratic restoration” (9), but the opposite happens in *The Little Stranger*. This further reversal of roles creates a complex situation in which the central tensions of the novel between old and new, modern and Gothic, are left unresolved – as, it is suggested, they should remain. Waters’s problematisation of the grand narrative of progress in this novel does not provide easy answers or recommendations, but is rather concerned with portraying progress in a more complex light than would be conveyed through the grand narrative. In *The Little Stranger*, progress is a force of liberation, yes, but also destruction, and it is the drive to advance that acts as exorcism in this text. Ironically, then, progress is achieved through a supernatural force – a thing usually relegated, as Faraday and the court investigating Caroline’s death suggest, to the superstitious, “rustic boob[ies]” (Waters 263). It is through these conflicting paradigms of the rational and the supernatural (Boehm 252), as well as the schism they cause in Doctor Faraday, that Waters orchestrates her critique of the grand narrative of progress to illustrate the tensions behind such a drive. The struggle on the post-war Gothic cusp also entails an amount of regression, in that Doctor Faraday is shown to be so haunted by the past and his desire for Hundreds Hall and all it symbolises, that he is unable to move forward as Betty does. While the new eventually prospers, its advancement is shown to come at a cost. History – as it is represented by the Ayreses and their dominance based on class structures – and not evil, is exorcised.

The text clearly positions the ‘commoners’, among them Faraday and Betty, as the beneficiaries of the Ayreses’ downfall. As Faraday muses when they run into each other afterward, it seems strange to him that, “out of the wreckage of that terrible year, she and I were the only survivors” (496). Betty, whose wish to escape service by faking a belly-ache brings Faraday to the Hall in the first place, finally does get a job at a factory, finds a “young man” (496) and appears to enjoy her post-Hundreds life. The council houses built on the Hundreds boundary are described as a “great success, so much so that last year a dozen more were added, and others are planned” (495). Many of these ‘newcomers’ become patients of Faraday’s, and he notes that the houses are “cosy enough, with neat flower and vegetable gardens, and swings and slides set up for the children” (495). Faraday benefits by far the most from the Ayreses’ downfall. Throughout the novel he experiences growing dread about the implementation of the National Health Service, which he fears will cause him to lose all of his patients. To the contrary, his involvement with the Ayreses, which lands him in several newspapers, makes his name familiar to new patients who come to see him as a “sort of ‘coming man’” (494). It is important to stress that Waters does not vilify the classes, but

attempts to depict the shifting of class dynamics realistically as a struggle between various forces, among them the old and the new. While Faraday, whose creation of the revenant and terrible impact on the Ayreses marks him as a villain, Waters provides a working class character to whom the reader can relate. In an interview with Kaye Mitchell, Waters states that “*The Little Stranger* ultimately I felt was a novel about class conflict, about waste and failure really; it’s about the failure of the Ayreses and of Faraday to evolve. The only person who evolves is Betty: she’s the image of the working class future, she’s on her way up, she’s on her way out, she’s unharmed by what’s happened” (133). While Faraday often suspects Betty of falseness, the denouement of the text favours her with a happy outcome. Faraday benefits greatly from the ordeal, but he remains haunted by and obsessed with Hundreds Hall. Although the text demonstrates that the ‘lower’ classes are indeed better off for the progress made due to the dissolution of the rigid class hierarchies in Britain, *The Little Stranger* does not allow the reader to forget Faraday’s complicity in the violent destruction of a family.

Progress, *The Little Stranger* shows, is then not only a narrative of liberation, but also of destruction. It is Faraday’s progress – his desires, aspirations and resentments – that exorcises the old in the form of the Ayreses, who themselves have failed to progress sufficiently. The text suggests that History is at work through Faraday. While progress itself is not a negative concept insofar as it allows for greater equality and the loosening of class structures, *The Little Stranger* suggests that one must be aware of the process and the violence involved in this struggle. As Jerome de Groot argues, “[h]istorical novels critique the hegemonic structure of a totalizing, explaining past” (“Something New” 57). In the case of *The Little Stranger*, the class structures and hegemonies of post-war Britain are investigated, but it is the triumphant narrative of progress that is critiqued and problematised. The ‘little stranger’s’ hauntology presents a call to justice that draws attention to a more complex and nuanced narrative of class struggle and the drive for progress. Hay suggests that:

[A]s narratives, ghost stories typically *fail* to account for modernity; and what they are struggling in vain to account for is a *failed* (or at least, endangered) transition to modernity. The modernity on display in the ghost story has not successfully distinguished itself from its past; indeed, the whole point of the ghost story is that the present *cannot* wrench free of the past and so has not become fully modern. (15)

Waters does depict progress, even triumphant progress, but her call to justice in the form of the revenant is a call to greater understanding of a narrative that slyly promotes “totalizing, explaining pasts” (De Groot, “Something New” 57). The revenant’s “wholly irrecoverable intrusion” (Davis 9) into the realism of post-war Britain renders the narrative of progress in a

more realistic light that questions the idea of a grand march of History. It is thus not only a narrative of liberation and advancement, but also of destruction and abjection. This would suggest that, far from achieving greater 'civilisation' through progress, modernity is still fraught with the violence and turmoil of old, which is embodied in Faraday's spectre.

Chapter 3:

History and the Perfection of Evil in Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*

Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* interrogates History through its combination of subgenres and its juxtaposition of the Enlightenment narrative of progress with a narrative of evil. Through its manipulation of Neo-Gothic fiction, romance of the archive and *Bildungsroman* subgenres, *The Historian* highlights contemporary tensions between old and new. These tensions are brought to the fore through Kostova's depiction of the revenant, Dracula, and his ambitions to perfect evil by preserving its history and ensuring its future. In *The Historian*, the question becomes whether knowledge, epistemology and reason are being used to further good or evil. To this effect, the novel presents a narrative of progress in the *bildungs* of three young academics who must save their mentors from the danger posed by a centuries-old vampire. However, their successful *bildungs* are subverted by a darker *bildung*, which is insinuated through Dracula's efforts to document humanity's capacity for evil. In this sense, the Enlightenment narrative of progress that is traditionally encapsulated in the conventional concept of *bildung* is undercut and interrogated: Dracula's diabolical archive proves that the development of evil has been far more effective and successful in the sweep of History than the historians' *bildungs* and their contributions to a better society. As such, *The Historian* fulfils the Neo-Gothic imperative to confront traditional narratives of progress and to re-evaluate them in updated terms. This chapter will therefore investigate *The Historian*'s critique of the Enlightenment narrative of progress through its representation of history as it is embodied in the revenant, its use of generic conventions from the three subgenres mentioned above, and its complex depiction of the good-evil binary.

Kostova's interest in history and its effects is illustrated in her as yet small oeuvre. To date, she has published two novels: *The Historian* and *The Swan Thieves* (2010). Both of these novels feature historical narratives that address the tensions between the past and the present. *The Historian*, her debut, broke sales records on its first day of publication and outsold Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) (Olson 286). Although it has been heavily criticised as presenting a lacklustre villain and for providing little variation between the voices of different characters, *The Historian* has sustained a popular appeal that plays into several trends in the publishing world, among them the lust for vampire stories and the

interest in 500-year-old conspiracy theories (Stevenson para. 2). While not much critical work has been done on *The Historian*, the sparse academic attention it did garner focuses on Kostova's portrayal of history in the light of Post-9/11 American discourses on terrorism and the clash between Western Judeo-Christian and Eastern Islamic civilisations. Andrew Smith provides a brief consideration of how the novel "addresses a number of themes centring on religious conflict between Christian and Islamic beliefs and provides an outline of post-World War II European politics" ("Neo-Victorian History" 54), but focuses his chapter on the Neo-Victorian aspects of *The Historian*. Danel Olson also focuses on Kostova's depiction of politics and religious clashes. He suggests that "Kostova extracts the lifeblood of Carmilla and Dracula and mingles it with that of historic martial leaders from Genghis Khan to Stalin and Hitler to create a war Gothic of her own" (289). Although Olson's chapter contains inaccurate textual details,¹ his analysis of the text's portrayal of evil provides a useful exposition of Dracula's role in the novel. Smith and Olson's chapters suggest something of Kostova's depiction of history as a catalogue of evil rather than good, but neither treats this aspect as their focus. This chapter will therefore concentrate on Kostova's treatment of History and its relationship with evil, and how this relationship is represented through Dracula's haunting presence during monumental social and political upheavals in the twentieth century.

Generic Conventions and Crossovers in *The Historian*

The Historian presents a challenging composition that is difficult to classify. To start with, it is a vampire story, an adventure tale, a travelogue, an epistolary novel and a *Bildungsroman*. Furthermore, it can be seen as a 'romance of the archive' and, of course, a Neo-Gothic novel that mixes historical and Gothic fiction conventions. The tale consists of a "Russian-doll set of embedded narrative levels" (Keen, "Magical Values" 125) that relay the unnamed narrator's quest for Dracula and her long lost mother. Her story is related through the "stitch[ing] together to make a continuous narrative" (Kostova vii) of various personal and historical documents, such as the letters and postcards inherited from her father, Paul; her own experiences during the last years of her adolescence; Paul's verbal account of how he

¹ Olson claims that Bartholomew Rossi, Helen Rossi and Paul are all Oxford historians, and suggests that the narrator is not (286). In fact, only Rossi and the narrator can be called Oxford historians, as they are the only ones who spend significant portions of their academic careers at Oxford University. Olson also claims that Stephen Barley is Paul's Oxford student (Olson 286), when he is in fact the student of Master Hugh James (Kostova 172), and that Barley invites the unnamed narrator to "Come, ... come up to bed" (Kostova 634 qtd in Olson 299), when these are Helen's words to Paul (Kostova 634).

became involved in the hunt for Dracula, which is told over the course of years during trips to an array of European countries; the letters bequeathed to him by his mentor and doctoral advisor, Bartholomew Rossi, which are addressed to “My dear and unfortunate successor” (5); and fragments of historical evidence spread across the archives and monasteries of Europe. This sprawling narrative is framed by the narrator’s “Note to the Reader”,² which issues a dire warning: “As a historian, I have learnt that, in fact, not everyone who reaches back into history can survive it. And it is not only reaching back that endangers us; sometimes history itself reaches inexorably forward for us with its shadowy claw” (vii). The researchers are not merely trying to solve a medieval mystery, but are actively pursuing a monster, whose unnatural ontology marks him as evil. In *The Historian*, evil is then not really buried in a tomb, but lives through archives, documents and passports, and haunts its victims through their own epistemological aspirations and attempts to record, and thereby control, History.³ The novel’s revenant, Dracula, can himself be seen as a pure manifestation of History who makes it his business to further the perfection of evil through historical research (644). In *The Historian*, then, characters are very obviously haunted by, and haunting, History.

The Historian’s complex narrative spans several time frames, but the most important are the three decades that chart the characters’ experiences during the twentieth century. In the 1930s, Oxford historian Bartholomew Rossi finds a mysterious book that leads him on a quest to locate Dracula’s tomb. His quest is interrupted when a vampire posing as a bureaucrat confiscates his research, and it is later summarily ended when his friend is brutally murdered on his doorstep. Rossi’s student, Paul, resumes the quest in the 1950s, after Rossi himself disappears following Paul’s discovery of a similar book. This time, the adventure only ends in the discovery of Dracula’s tomb, but Dracula himself escapes and continues to haunt Paul’s family. In the 1970s, his own daughter becomes involved in the hunt for Dracula when she stumbles upon Paul’s copy of the mysterious book in his library. Kostova’s complex list of characters thus consists of a group of historians who are tracing the continued existence and influence of Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia. As the narrator succinctly describes it: “This is the story of how as a girl of sixteen I went in search of my father and his past, and

² The author’s note to the reader also serves as one of the novel’s main legitimating techniques, as it establishes the credentials of the narrator as an Oxford historian (ix), explains her methodology (viii) and even includes a list of acknowledgements (viii), thereby mimicking academic authorial prefaces.

³ As explained in the Introduction, ‘History’ with a capital ‘H’ refers specifically to the narrative of history that configures past events into a chronicle of progress. The *Historian*’s characters are particularly concerned with the narrative of history and how History is constructed, and are consequently not only investigating the past and its events, but the way in which these events have been construed.

of how he went in search of his beloved mentor and his mentor's own history, and of how we all found ourselves on one of the darkest pathways into history" (Kostova vii). In this novel, History itself takes on a haunting quality as it plagues the lives of these historians through the continued presence of Dracula.

The narrative is further complicated by Kostova's employment of three important generic strains that together affect her challenge to the Enlightenment narrative of progress: Neo-Gothic fiction, the romance of the archive and the *Bildungsroman*. These subgenres come to the fore most strongly in Kostova's tale, and other possible generic strains are subordinated to them. First, as a Neo-Gothic text, *The Historian* combines Gothic and historical fiction conventions to represent a revenant in a past era, whose disruptive hauntology contributes to a critique of the grand narrative of progress. Second, Kostova orchestrates her plot through the employment of the romance of the archive, which also works with the historical fiction conventions to establish a sense of realism. Third, the traditional *Bildungsroman* is evoked to provide psychological realism in terms of Kostova's characters, and to contrast with the evil narrative of progress established through Dracula's library. Over these layers of historical and psychological realism, Kostova lays a vampire hunt that disrupts the epistemologies of her researchers through the vampire's monstrous ontology. The continued existence after death and the haunting presence of Dracula and his vampiric minions disrupt the lives of Kostova's 'modern' characters, whose status as researchers and empiricists are emphasised throughout the novel. It is through her combination of these three subgenres that Kostova establishes her interrogation of the grand narrative of progress, and this orchestration will therefore be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Gothicising the Archive: Dracula and *Dracula*

As a Neo-Gothic text, *The Historian* addresses the grand narrative of progress through its use of Gothic and historical fiction conventions and its representation of the revenant. As mentioned above, the novel contains an unnamed, unreliable narrator who presents her text as a record of truth. It recreates historical periods through meticulous detail and it portrays an evil revenant in the form of a vampire whose disruptive ontology and blood-thirsty epistemology work together to represent the new being haunted by the old. Kostova's rendering of Gothic conventions depends primarily on her intertextual references to the most

famous of Gothic vampire tales, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*,⁴ and her portrayal of the revenant in *The Historian*. Kostova draws significantly on the lore established by Stoker in his influential work, but also attempts to rewrite this 'ur'-Gothic myth by situating the infamous Dracula in his historical environment, and by re-centring "[vampire] lore in its historical sources and actual locations" (Keen, "Magical Values" 125). *The Historian* thus uses the 'real' historical figure on which Stoker's Count Dracula is based – Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia – as its Dracula, and draws upon traditional legends and folktales for its rendering of the vampire myth. Like other vampires in traditional and Gothic accounts, Kostova's Dracula drinks blood to sustain himself, sleeps in a coffin, can be (somewhat) deterred by religious iconography and invocations, and can be defeated by driving a stake or silver bullet through his heart. As in *Dracula*, it takes three attacks by a vampire to be transformed into one, and this transformation can only be stopped by killing the host of the vampiric entity (Kostova 479). However, unlike Stoker's Count, Kostova's Dracula is more interested in librarians, archivists and historians than young women, and feasts on knowledge and evidence of human evil rather than babies. As such, Kostova's Dracula is a more intellectual specimen whose great Gothic plot is to sustain himself, literally to sustain his identity as Vlad III, through the creation of a diabolical archive.

In closely recalling Stoker's Count, Kostova's Dracula marks a departure from twenty-first century popular depictions of vampires to invoke an older, more sinister configuration. William Hughes explains that contemporary renderings of the vampire depict "the un-dead state [as] nothing more than a parallel lifestyle – a modified, rather than wholly new, existence typified by change of diet and the imposition of a few more-or-less onerous restrictions" (203). These contemporary vampires are also often the narrators of their own stories, or at least then the protagonists as opposed to the antagonists (Hughes 203). Kostova's vampires, on the other hand, hark back to the rather more villainous incarnations of the nineteenth century, when vampires were "narrated rather than narrating", and access to the vampire was "limited by his or her representation in diaries and letters, or by the conventions of moral outrage or regret" (Hughes 203). The nineteenth-century vampire is considered one of the "predatory undead, often regarded as a corpse whose sinful soul is animated by fiendish powers" (Cavallaro 180). As discussed in Chapter 1, they are

⁴ As Hughes states, "the vampire and Count Dracula have become effectively synonymous", and "[t]he eponymous anti-hero of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel has become *the* reference point to which the characteristics of other vampires are judged to have adhered, or to have departed from" (197, his emphasis).

categorically evil: it is not their actions that make monsters of them, but their very ontology.⁵ Kostova's vampires are thus not sex symbols or socially transgressive figures. Whereas contemporary vampire stories romanticise the vampiric state, Kostova takes pains to associate that state with an indisputable evil that is closer to 'real' evil than supernatural evil. She also takes pains to highlight the 'real' evil committed by political figures like Vlad III in their thirst for power, and draws a direct connection between Vlad III's evil deeds during life and Dracula's evil nature in death. Once dead, Dracula does not commit evil on the same scale (if measured in the cost of human lives), but rather exhibits an ontological evil that dictates his being, and this evil infects his minions through saliva and blood.

While Dracula's intentions are not made wholly clear, his master plan involves defying death by building an archive of evil, which he can then expand by leading his minions to live history, as he does. Dracula's hauntology then consists of disrupting traditional ontology by defying death through his continued life and the building of his diabolical archive. The narrator's own rudimentary research into the historical figure of Vlad III suggests that he has been quite successful at "preserving [his] own history forever" (634):

The extraordinary thing about the information available on Dracula is its longevity – that is to say, his refusal to die as an historical presence, the persistence of his legend. The few sources available in England refer directly or obliquely to other sources whose diversity would make any historian profoundly curious [...]. Dracula's notoriety did not end with his mysterious death and strange burial in 1476, but seems to have continued almost unabated until it faded into the brightness of the Enlightenment in the West. (Kostova 59)

Dracula thus persists through historical record, legend and superstition. He seeks out as his converts the academic and librarian – the curators of knowledge. His dragon books "go only to the most promising scholars, and to those [he] think[s] may be persistent enough to follow the dragon to his lair" (632). These scholars are infected with vampirism, which the text suggests only amplifies humans' natural predilection for cruelty. As Jonathan Glover asserts, "[t]he tradition [of cruelty], like a virus, is easily carried across national and ideological frontiers" (38). Kostova represents this notion through the transmission of vampirism, which taints the victim with a hunger for both cruelty and knowledge. By infecting scholars through the vampire's bite, Dracula aims to cultivate "servants" (643) who can collect and catalogue evil, and who can eventually experiment with evil in order to perfect it. What Glover terms the human "love of cruelty" (33) is brought out through Dracula's infection, in order to allow

⁵ Critics have noted the "anemic" [sic] nature of the horror in *The Historian* (Olson 285). The vampire's actions are no crueller nor more evil than the average human inclination to scheme, murder and intimidate to get their way. In fact, only three people are made vampires in *The Historian*, and their conversions are more plot devices than illustrations of evil. Instead, evil is situated in humans and their legacies of cruelty and oppression.

the victim to pursue knowledge without regard for life or happiness (Kostova 647). The *raison d'être* of these vampiric scholars is not quite to be evil, but to live out the human potential for evil in order to record it. Kostova's Dracula is thus obsessed with preserving the past by collecting archivists and gathering historical evidence that document his history – a History of evil. Kostova therefore Gothicises the romance of the archive by creating a revenant who employs the powers of knowledge and epistemology in order to promote evil.

Romancing the Archive: Quests for Knowledge

It is through Dracula's investment in his diabolical library and the physical traces he leaves in the form of letters, documents and his mysterious dragon book that Kostova combines Neo-Gothic fiction conventions with the romance of the archive. In fact, many of the novel's Gothic and romance of the archive conventions overlap, as the romance of the archive is also derived, in part, from Gothic fiction (Keen, *Romances* 69–72). Kostova's novel well and truly fulfils the definition of a 'romance of the archive' as set out by Suzanne Keen in "Magical Values in Recent Romances of the Archive", which expands on her initial definition of the subgenre in *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (2001). According to Keen's well-defined list of traits, these books contain "character-researchers", romance adventure stories "in which 'research' features as a kernel plot action", the depiction of "discomforts and inconveniences suffered in the service of knowledge", "sex and physical pleasure gained as a result of questing", various settings and locations that "contain archives of actual papers", a portrayal of the "material traces of the past holding the truth" and the "evocation of history looking back from a postimperial context" (*Romances* 24). For American romances of the archive, Keen suggests that travel is especially emphasised, and that the postimperial perspective does not apply ("Magical Values" 116). Although *The Historian* does place an emphasis on travelling and visiting archives as the only way to track down Dracula and to "[look] history in her subtle face" (Kostova 6), it also contains some postimperialist themes in terms of the attention paid to the Cold War and the Communist Bloc. Its retrospective depiction of Soviet countries offers a critique of imperialist tendencies. Moreover, *The Historian* lays significant emphasis on a clash of civilisations between Western Judeo-Christian and Eastern Islamic forces, and evokes Dracula's own imperial aspirations as a threat to modernity. This clash is historicised and problematised in the wake of twenty-first-century tensions. Kostova's exploration of the "borderlands between East and West" brings the "conflict between Islam and Vlad the Impaler's brutal brand of Christianity" to the fore (Höglund 8). As the narrator states in her address to the reader, the text offers

“glimpses of religious and territorial conflict between an Islamic East and a Judeo-Christian West [that] will be painfully familiar to a modern reader” (Kostova viii). Kostova takes pains to highlight the cruel and evil deeds perpetrated on both ‘sides’ of this clash, and thereby draws attention to the ability of evil to infect people across both physical and ideological borders. These tensions and their continuation into modern times also suggest that evil is not a concept that can be relegated to a historical period. Like Dracula, it lives on, both in archives and in the ‘real’ world.

The novel’s use of romance of the archive conventions ties in closely with its historical fiction status. Although *The Historian* is not set very far in the past, it does lay emphasis on its settings as significant epochs in the course of the twentieth century, and takes pains to depict historical details that date the narratives accurately. A sense of history is further augmented by Kostova’s portrayal of the research done by her historians, which illustrates a concern not only with history, but also with historiography. As Keen suggests,

[b]y characterizing the researcher who investigates, and then learns the joys, costs and consequences of discovery, romances of the archive persistently question the purposes of historical knowledge, and the kind of reading that directs the imagination to conceive the past. (*Romances* 3)

In *The Historian*, this kind of reading takes on the form of scattered personal letters, obscure documents and records from medieval times and an array of fragmentary evidence spread over the archives of Europe and Istanbul. The adventure lies in tracking down these sources and following the incremental clues left by centuries of historians. As Rossi suggests, “this ghastly trail of scholarship, like so many less awful ones, is merely something one person makes a little progress on, then another, each contributing a bit in his own lifetime” (Kostova 36). Through the course of the novel, these historians meet international counterparts who have also received Dracula’s calling card, and it is suggested that their cumulative scholarship and the wealth of knowledge stored in archives around the world will endow the adventurer-historians with the necessary power, through knowing, to track and defeat Dracula. In this sense the Enlightenment narrative of progress through knowledge is seemingly bolstered. The records and close study of evil throughout the centuries help the historians track down Dracula’s tomb and eventually Dracula himself. However, Kostova subverts this victorious narrative through the implication that the historians bear a dark responsibility for the knowledge that they uncover. Ironically, their very pursuit of Dracula generates the knowledge that he himself covets and collects.

The historians’ painstaking excavations of secrets through decades of research and interrogation therefore correspond to Jacques Derrida’s concept of exorc-analysis. Derrida

emphasises the irresistible nature of the attempt at exorcism: “let us recall once more [...] an *irresistible* but *interminable* hunt for ghosts (*Gespenst*) and for *revenants* or spooks (*Spuk*). *Irresistible* like an effective critique, but also like a compulsion; *interminable* as one says of analysis” (*Specters* 58, his emphasis). As historians trained in empiricist research methods and historiographical understanding, Kostova’s protagonists fall prey to this compulsion to investigate and exorcise. Once they receive the book, they are compelled to unravel its mysteries. As Rossi states, he is enticed by the book because of the puzzle it presents, and he asserts that “every scholar worth his salt” would be interested because “[i]t’s the reward of the business, to look history in the eye and say, ‘I know who you are. You can’t fool me’” (Kostova 18). The mysteriousness of the book, its lack of labels or distinguishing features and its puzzling ontology,⁶ awaken and drive a need to identify and classify in the empirically-minded scholars. Their thirst for knowledge is fuelled by a belief in the intrinsic goodness of knowing and the ability of knowledge to stave off evil, which is reflected in the instances of historical archives specifically created to fight Dracula, such as the libraries Paul and Helen visit in Istanbul and Budapest. These archives were created by leaders who had faced Dracula in life to help discover and cure the evil that takes root in his wake (216; 369).⁷ The historians’ belief in the power of knowledge is therefore so strong that they attempt to arm themselves against Dracula with empirical research. This recalls Enlightenment concepts of banishing ‘darkness’ through the ‘light’ of reason and knowledge. Superstitions and traditions are initially eschewed and replaced with a belief in their “intellectual, their psychological, equivalents” (Kostova 68). Rossi finds a “strong mental antidote” (Kostova 37) to evil in rationalism, research and empiricism. When Paul asks if he needs a rosary or other talisman, Rossi tells him: “I’m sure you carry your own goodness, moral *sense*, whatever you want to call it, with you” (Kostova 37, my emphasis). He explains further, “Perhaps I’ve been wrong not to make use of those ancient superstitions, but I’m a rationalist, I suppose, and I’ll stick to that” (Kostova 37). Bolstered by the power of knowledge, the empirical historians rationally go about attempting to establish the book’s origin, the nature of its being and the meaning of its image through historical research.

⁶ Although Rossi attempts to have his book identified through the era’s latest scientific methods, the tests and investigations fail to establish the origins of the mysterious book. Each character notes the enigma presented by the book’s age, its blank pages and the woodcut of the dragon that appears in each version of the book, clutching a banner with the word “Drakulya” (11). The book is so drastically out of sorts, even in libraries that house age-old tomes, that the researchers cannot ignore its call to action.

⁷ While this is the reason given for the creation of these archives, they do not seem to harbour much in the way of directly helpful information. The historians can only glean small clues in either archive.

However, it is exactly this impulse to hunt for Dracula, this curiosity and thirst for knowledge that entangles them ever deeper in Dracula's legacy and ironically allows him to add to his own archive. Even though their research allows them to finally track him down, it comes at a dire cost to their own and their loved ones' lives. Paul's cat is murdered (119), Rossi's friend has his throat torn out (94), a mysterious car crash puts Master James's fiancée in a permanent coma (366–7) and the narrator's kindly librarian-acquaintance's skull is bashed in (110). It is for this reason that Rossi relinquishes his Dracula research. In his letters he claims: "I don't wear garlic, or crucifixes, or cross myself at the sound of a step in the hall. I have a better protection than that – I have stopped digging at that dreadful crossroads of history. Something must be satisfied to see me quiet, because I have been untroubled by further tragedy" (106). Ignorance offers some protection, but Rossi is unable to resist his scholarly impulse for long. Like the other historians, he returns to the research. The call to action sustained through the dragon book is too great to resist and Rossi is then chosen to be Dracula's personal librarian because of his inability quit the research. Because Dracula wants only those researchers who will pursue knowledge despite dire threat and who will sacrifice their happiness for the chance to partake in history, he indirectly threatens his victims to test their dedication. As he explains to Rossi: "You would not be here if you had not wanted to come. No one else has ever disregarded my warning twice in a lifetime. You have brought yourself" (Kostova 633). It is thus the researchers' own epistemological drives, their need to research and to know, that allow Dracula to use them for the furthering of the perfection of evil.

Kostova therefore persistently questions the purposes of historical knowledge by making her historians complicit in recording and preserving a history of evil. Dracula compiles their research for his own diabolical library, and uses it to expand his record of evil as well as his own personal history (although it is suggested that these two are synonymous, to an extent). The excavation of these physical traces, in the form of texts and archival evidence, of Dracula's influence and the history of human cruelty serve only to establish the continuity of evil, from medieval times through to the twenty-first century. In the early 2000s, the then middle-aged narrator finally receives her own copy of Dracula's book, which suggests the perpetuation of his ambitious legacy, if (perhaps) not his physical incarnation. Long after Dracula is meant to have been exorcised and his plot defeated, the evidence for the development and continuation of evil in times considered modern and humanitarian is still overwhelming. Kostova's romance of the archive therefore suggests that, far from perfecting humanity, the grand narrative of progress has been more applicable to the development of

evil, which has progressed to a state of excellence. By gathering knowledge and compiling his diabolical library, Dracula has been able to trace the progression of evil through history. Ironically, then, the Enlightenment object of expanding knowledge to further progress, which is often rendered as a movement from bad to good, only encourages a perfection of bad, or evil. The irony of this development is highlighted by Kostova's choice of the great European archives as her setting: where, according to Enlightenment ideals, the light of civilisation should be harboured, Kostova's historians find the enduring darkness that defines humanity. Kostova thus combines Neo-Gothic fiction and romance of the archive conventions in order to orchestrate the complex depiction of two conflicting narratives of progress, or *bildungs*. The first *bildung* tracks the traditional trajectory of subject formation in a social sphere through the historians' quests to find Dracula by following the rigours of academic research. Their quests mould them into historians who positively contribute toward society by attempting to exorcise evil through knowledge. The second *bildung* subverts the traditional narrative of progress by asserting that the historians' efforts do not succeed in eradicating evil, but rather contribute to it by feeding Dracula's diabolical library. It is in the juxtaposition of these two *bildungs* that Kostova subverts the traditional *Bildungsroman* and thereby critiques the grand narrative of progress.

Building the Archive: Growing up Good

The Historian depicts a traditional *bildung* through its focus on the researcher-characters' development. For all three of the historians, finding the dragon book marks the start of their personal *bildungs*, during which each leaves the comforts of home, explores far-off places, finds a romantic partner and makes some contribution toward conquering an ancient evil. Although *The Historian* is not quite a traditional *Bildungsroman* – it has three *bildungsheroes* instead of one, focuses on the development of a woman in the twentieth century, and this development takes shape over multiple subgenres that include non-realistic elements, such as the vampire – it does fulfil some of the prominent elements required of a *Bildungsroman* according to Jerome H. Buckley. *The Historian* portrays “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love and the search for a vocation and a working philosophy” (Buckley 18). These elements are spread over the three *bildungsheroes* and their respective quests, and are tied together through the family romance that develops as Paul and Helen Rossi, Bartholomew Rossi's estranged daughter, fall in love and get married. *The Historian* thus does present a version of the traditional *Bildungsroman* in that its focalisers and narrator ‘grow up’ and find their places in

society as academics or diplomats who ostensibly contribute to Western ‘civilisation’ through their work. However, while *The Historian* presents *bildungs*, and some successful ones at that, it goes some way toward subverting these *bildungs* and suggesting that they are temporary achievements in lives of either personal misery or mediocrity. The more successful *bildung* by far is the story of evil and its triumphs in the twentieth century. In this way, Kostova subverts the traditional *Bildungsroman* as it is described by Mikhail Bakhtin in “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)”. In this chapter, Bakhtin establishes that the *Bildungsroman* is a novel about the emergence of ‘man’, or, in other words, the development of ‘civilisation’ (19). *The Historian* uses this sense of the *Bildungsroman* to suggest that civilisation has in fact not developed as the Enlightenment narrative of progress predicted, and that humans have emerged as anything but enlightened.

Kostova first establishes the *bildungs* of her historian characters along traditional *Bildungsroman* lines. According to M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham, the *Bildungsroman* or ‘novel of formation’ depicts the “development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one’s identity and role in the world” (229). This is clear in the development of *The Historian*’s narrator. She starts as a young, naïve girl whose journey is educational in terms of both her sexuality and her identity. The novel begins with her discovery of the dragon book under a copy of the *Kama Sutra*, and she experiences a sexual awakening during the course of her travels. Her quest also becomes, in part, a search for her long lost mother and the reconstruction of her family, and thus her identity, becomes an important element. Moreover, it is through the quest that she discovers her vocation as a historian. The narrator therefore becomes a functioning member of society by the end of the novel. Her family has been reconstructed, her identity consolidated, and her contribution to Western society is mapped out. In this sense, Kostova employs a clear-cut *bildung* that tracks the subject’s development from a child to an adult, and this form is repeated for both Rossi and Paul. Rossi finds a lover and, although their plans to be married are disrupted by Dracula, the tryst results in a child: Helen. Furthermore, Rossi becomes an influential academic renowned for his contribution to history. Paul, on the other hand, meets and later falls in love with Helen while on their quest for Rossi, and their marriage results in the birth of the unnamed narrator. He also realises his vocation as a diplomat, and the establishment of his diplomatic mission is a direct result of the quest. Their

bildungs trace a development from young and naïve students or children to wise and seasoned adults who can make a contribution to society.

The *Bildungsroman* can thus be seen as a narrative of progress in itself – it mimics the larger societal narrative of progress propounded through Enlightenment ideals at the level of the individual self, which is situated in the *bildungshero*. As John Maynard asserts, the *Bildungsroman* focuses “on the issue of how much the individual is a product and creature of society and, more specifically, on the ways in which he or she should be read as an allegory of the society’s condition” (283). These assertions are derived from Bakhtin’s fragmentary work on the *Bildungsroman*, which suggests that the most important type of *Bildungsroman* is that which draws the *bildungshero* as emerging “along with the world and [reflecting] the historical emergence of the world itself” (23, his emphasis). Therefore the *Bildungsroman* is not merely a psychological ‘growing up’, but also reflects the ‘growing up’ of society. Tobias Boes also comes to this conclusion by applying Rita Felski’s evaluation of modernist studies in her *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) to the *Bildungsroman*. He states that,

Felski’s central insight is that the nineteenth-century post-Hegelian and post-Darwinian impulse to conceive of *history* in teleological and evolutionary terms (two lines of thought that, although in reality opposed to one another, were often fused together by the Victorians) found a correlate in narratives of *individual* development that obey the same rhetorical logic. (Boes 235, his emphasis)

Much like the Gothic cusp, the *Bildungsroman* depicts a hero at a point in history when evolution is necessary and when a new form of being and thinking struggles to rid itself of older, less ‘evolved’ forms. As Bakhtin asserts, in the *Bildungsroman* “[t]he organizing force held by the future is therefore extremely great [...] and this is not, of course, the private biographical future, but the historical future” (23). The *Bildungsroman* is therefore not just the novel of one person’s formation, but can be read as the novel of human formation in modernity. Human formation, expressed through identity, is judged complete or achieved when the human in question subscribes to the norms and values of his or her society (Moretti 23). Once this has been accomplished, it is suggested, humanity as a whole will also be more highly evolved, and thus one step closer to Hegel’s idea of the end of history. Even though the *Bildungsroman* has undergone various revisions and updates since its eighteenth-century heyday, and has “broadened to include coming-of-age narratives that bear only cursory resemblance to nineteenth-century European models” (Boes 231), the traditional trajectory and representational capacity of the *Bildungsroman* has endured.

There then exists an established link between the *Bildungsroman*, the Enlightenment ideals that fostered such a triumphant tale of progress, and the idea of identity as being

determined by fitting into a society with its specific norms and values. The *Bildungsroman* shows its concern with tensions between the old and the new by depicting a *bildungshero* that must struggle to evolve, and a society that evolves with him or her. The norms and values of ‘Modern’ Western society, which are represented through Kostova’s ‘modern’ characters, are considered to be humanistic, progressive and considerate because of ‘modern’ society’s emphasis on human rights and notions of justice achieved through advanced legal systems. This is, especially, a notion that rules concepts of the twentieth century, during which various bodies with the explicit aim of establishing and protecting human rights, such as the United Nations, Amnesty International, and so forth come into being following instances of gross violence during the two World Wars and other major conflicts. In *The Historian*, this is reflected in Paul’s choice to leave historical research in order to establish “the Center for Peace and Democracy” (Kostova 3). After his first ordeal with Dracula, Paul comes to the conclusion that “[w]e need peace and diplomatic enlightenment, not more research on tiny questions no one else cares about” (Kostova 44). An emphasis on human rights is further supported by the characters’ constant condemnation of the atrocities and ‘evil’ with which they come into contact, and the suggestion that Dracula, whose list of atrocities derives mainly from his exploits while alive, remains evil and tainted even in death. The *bildungs* of each historian reflect this imperative to be ‘good’, a concept only vaguely defined in *The Historian*, and to cast off the temptation of evil that rests not so much in Dracula and vampirism, but in History itself.

The Good, the Bad, and the *Bildung* in *The Historian*

Kostova uses her depiction of two contrasting *bildungs* to create a complex, binarised representation of good and evil that will be discussed in this section. The historians’ *bildungs* depict good in Kostova’s novel, while the *bildung* traced by Dracula’s diabolical library represents evil. Good and evil are consequently determined not so much by the actions of the characters, but rather by their identities as humans. In terms of the historians, the *bildung* undergone by each hero suggests a notion of good that has less to do with morality and heroism than with fitting in and growing up according to societal structures. Goodness, in *The Historian*, is then located in the continuation of family and living a simple, constructive life. The historians are at their happiest and best rewarded when they leave Dracula-research to pursue domestic bliss, as when Rossi considers abandoning his research to marry Helen’s mother and when Paul and Helen ‘set up house’ in Brooklyn after their ordeal. The

continuation of family as a 'good' in and of itself is also emphasised in the contrast created between Dracula's method of survival and that of his hunters. The historians and the group of vampire-hunters established through the Crescent Guard of the Sultan, a body of warriors founded to protect the Ottoman Empire from the Order of the Dragon (468), endure through natural procreation. They establish a lineage (469), while Dracula obtains and maintains his immortality through unnatural means. Goodness is then found in a 'natural' line of succession created by the Crescent Guard and the historians, and this is contrasted to Dracula's unnatural means of survival, which suspends the natural process of aging and thereby disrupts time and notions of ontology. Therefore, the historians and Crescent Guard are considered good because they are humans and not vampires, while the vampires are considered evil because they are monsters.

Goodness in *The Historian* is directly related to the notion of a successful *bildung*. This association is supported by the Socratic conception of morality which, according to Glover, suggests that "self-knowledge" leads to the realisation that "happiness depends on psychological integration, or wholeness" (27). As mentioned above, Rossi emphasises some innate "goodness" that lies in the individual's identity and is augmented by his or her actions, rather than being determined by them. During his last days as a human, Rossi determines: "I will use all my waning energy to remain myself to the last moment. If there is any good in life, in history, in my own past, I invoke it now. I invoke it with all the passion with which I have lived" (648).⁸ 'Good' is vested, then, in doing your job well, as when Paul gains protection from focusing on his Dutch merchant studies (121) and in being true to oneself. In other words, 'good' lies in preserving one's identity in the face of evil temptations. However, Kostova complicates their 'goodness' by suggesting that their quest for Dracula ironically aids in the vampire's own plans to further evil, and that they are his conjurers or evokers. Rossi first summons him by reading aloud the words etched in an ancient map: "In this spot, he is housed in evil. Reader, unbury him with a word" (Kostova 116). Shortly after, either Dracula himself or one of his minions appear. More importantly, their research itself conjures Dracula, first in the form of the book and then in terms of his haunting presence. Furthermore, it is their very search for knowledge that helps Dracula to expand his diabolical library. Although Kostova does depict heroic behaviour on the part of the historians, the text illustrates that their attempts to conquer evil through knowledge does not promote good, as

⁸ The "passion" with which Rossi has lived is related to his approach to teaching and academia, which is fondly recounted by Paul in an anecdote about Rossi's lecturing: "Sometimes he got so excited that he raised both arms and ran partway across the stage. There was a legend that he'd once fallen off the front in his rapture over the flowering of Greek democracy and had scrambled up again without missing a beat of his lecture" (14).

would be expected. Instead, the pursuit of Dracula results in the advancement of evil. Even though the historians eventually track Dracula down and attempt to conjure him away, his influence persists even after his second-death. Good is thus not achieved through heroic actions, but rather through the avoidance of evil: ignorance offers protection, and knowledge endangers. This vague and rather banal notion of good in *The Historian* is set against an extraordinary and pervasive evil that feeds on attempts to conquer it through knowledge.

It is through the juxtaposition of these two *bildungs* that Kostova orchestrates her Gothic Cusp and the Neo-Gothic sense of historical fear. *The Historian*'s Gothic cusp hints back at medieval 'barbarity', but situates the struggle between the past and the present in the twentieth century. This is the century during which ethics have taken on a more practical application, when "[w]hat is humanly most important has been moved from the margins to the centre" (Glover 6). Glover suggests that the century started optimistically, despite the Crimean and South African wars, because of the West's belief in Enlightenment ideals. These held that "the spread of a humane and scientific outlook would lead to the fading away, not only of war, but also of other forms of cruelty and barbarism. They would fill the chamber of horrors in the museum of our primitive past" (6). However, by the turn of the millennium, such optimism had all but petered out, and while the twentieth century can be described as progressive in many ways, it is more often characterised in terms of its extreme violence and 'barbarism'. The twentieth century is now considered to be one of the most vicious in history (Glover 3), with record numbers of atrocities recorded all over the world.⁹ Kostova recalls some of the critical struggles and failures in this century through her choice of three pivotal decades, when geopolitical forces threatened to or succeeded in toppling humanity into a state of violence that surpassed medieval barbarism. Paul notes that 1930 – the date on Rossi's first letters – "was three years before Hitler assumed dictatorial powers in Germany, a terror that surely precluded all other possibilities" (99), and frequent reference is made to the Cold War and despotism in the 1950s as Helen and Paul traverse the strict boundaries of Eastern Europe. The narrator visits occupied Greece with her father during the 1970s and mentions protests against American imperialism in the Vietnam War. Dracula himself celebrates the superiority of the twentieth century in terms of evil:

⁹ As Glover suggests, "[t]he twentieth-century history of large-scale cruelty and killing is only too familiar: the mutual slaughter of the First World War, the terror-famine of the Ukraine, the Gulag, Auschwitz, Dresden, the Burma Railway, Hiroshima, Vietnam, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Cambodia, Rwanda, the collapse of Yugoslavia" (2). Glover's list of examples covers only perhaps the most well-known atrocities committed during the twentieth century.

A fine century – I look forward to the rest of it. In my day, a prince was able to eliminate troublesome elements only one person at a time. You do this with an infinitely greater sweep. Think, for example, of the improvement from the accursed cannon that broke the walls of Constantinople to the divine fire your adoptive country dropped onto the Japanese cities some years ago. (643–644)

Dracula's veneration for this act implicates the United States of America (USA) in the history of evil that he is writing. The text thus calls the celebrated 'progressiveness' of the USA, considered one of the most 'advanced' nations of the twentieth century, into question. The Gothic cusp is then created through the depiction of a struggle between old ways of gaining power – cruelty and militarism – and new ways of perceiving and protecting humanity.

The Historian foregrounds the tensions between these two forces – one promoting greater humanitarian efforts through knowledge and the other charting greater depths of human depravity – through the depiction of Dracula, his diabolical library and the characterisation of the historians. Kostova's historians embody modern ideals regarding humanity and human rights. These 'modern' characters attempt to live normal, or normative, lives that follow the traditional trajectory of 'growing up', getting married, having children and contributing to society. Even though their Dracula-adventures kick-start their *bildungs*, they are the sole deviations from what seem to be 'normal' academic lives. Once they return, the historians fulfil their societal roles and contribute to the advancement of civilisation through knowledge. The 'Gothic' characters, Dracula and his vampire-archivists, subvert their efforts by using the knowledge they produce for evil purposes. Kostova's revenant thus particularly exemplifies Samuel Taylor Coleridge's two forces. As a centuries-old feudal lord, he embodies the "religious adherence to the Past and the Ancient, the Desire and the admiration of Permanence", but applies this desire to his "Passion for increase of Knowledge, for Truth as the offspring of Reason" (qtd. in Dekker 35). He serves his "Instincts of Progression" (Coleridge qtd. in Dekker 35) through the preservation of the past. To this purpose, Dracula keeps up "with the finest modern research" (Kostova 631). He becomes a historian "in order to preserve [his] own history forever" (632). Dracula's aim is to surpass his enemies through knowledge, so that he may "make history" and not "be its victim" (642). He intends to use the construction of this history in order to modernise as the world modernises (635) and thereby to ensure that evil spreads, and that history is lived again and again as humans continue their cycles of evil. The difference between good and evil, in this regard, appears to be in the fact that the historians' work contribute to societal knowledge, while Dracula's library is secret and closed, and used only to increase his privilege. His knowledge does not contribute to society, but rather he collects ways of disrupting and

destroying it for personal gain. Keen refers to Derrida's influential work *Archive Fever* (1996) to suggest that "a forbidden or repressed archive reveals state power exerting its authority unfairly over historians or, as in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), over the evidence-bearing texts themselves" (*Romances* 60–61). In the case of *The Historian*, Dracula exerts this power through his archive. In this sense Dracula turns the traditional narrative of progress on its head by establishing a narrative of progress that charts human 'progress' through our capacity for evil.

This evil is firmly located in *human* history – Dracula does not document great supernatural feats of evil, but rather the human capacity for cruelty and the disregard for life that marks History. He leads the historians into what Paul terms a "netherworld" of "sickness" that forms "a subtext of the ordinary narrative of history" (99). Paul's idea of ordinary here relates to the 'normal' developments of civilisation, such as trade relations and religion. That Paul takes a shallow approach to these topics seems evident, as the text makes clear just what kind of darkness comes from clashing religions and complex relations between nations. This is exemplified in Paul's attitude to his own dissertation topic on seventeenth-century Dutch merchants, which he comes to think of as banal and unimportant (221; 664).¹⁰ While this is incongruous with his character as a historian, Kostova uses Paul's naiveté to emphasise the idea that the "ordinary narrative of history" is flawed and incomplete. Once the historians are made aware of this netherworld, however, it haunts all of their experiences with history. The young narrator expresses this when she realises the 'truth' of historical events:

For all his attention to my historical education, my father had neglected to tell me this: history's terrible moments were real. I understand now, decades later, that he could never have told me. Only history itself can convince you of such a truth. And once you've seen that truth – really seen it – you can't look away. (40)

Paul echoes his daughter's words when he explains that he sees previously travelled routes "alternately as benign and bathed in blood", and attributes this sense to "the other trick of historical sight, to be unrelentingly torn between good and evil, peace and war" (316). Paul often presents his memories of European countries with a mention of their violent pasts. The Cold War, several civil wars and, of course, the Second World War are all mentioned with specific attention to humans' capacity for evil and destruction. These twentieth century atrocities are compared to the medieval clash of civilisations between Sultan Mehmed II and

¹⁰ His research seems to conveniently skim over colonisation and the Dutch East India Company.

Dracula, as well as Vlad III's well-documented bloodlust. The text is thus haunted by memories and examples of human rather than supernatural evil.

The lineage that Kostova establishes between medieval and modern evil therefore suggests that evil, cruelty and 'barbarity' have not been erased by progress, but rather improved and made more efficient. This is made startlingly clear by Dracula himself when he is finally encountered in his diabolical library. He specifically chooses Rossi for his ability to see the 'truth' of History, which is that "the nature of man is evil, sublimely so" (644). This conclusion is supported by his library, which is stocked with the well-documented evidence of human evil, provided by researchers like Rossi:

Here was a large cabinet full of manuals of torture, some of them dating to the ancient world. They ranged through the prisons of mediaeval England, to the torture chambers of the Inquisition, to the experiments of the Third Reich. Some of the Renaissance volumes contained woodcuts of implements of torture, others diagrams of the human body. Another section of the room chronicled the church heresies for which many of those manuals of torture had been employed. Another corner was dedicated to alchemy, another to witchcraft, another to philosophy of the most disturbing sort. (643)

Dracula's library suggests that, far from humans progressing from bad to good, they have only got better at being evil. He asserts that "Good is not perfectible, but evil is" (644), and invites Rossi to apply his considerable intellect "in service of what *is* perfectible" (644, my emphasis). Dracula is collating, in archival form, the dark *bildung* of the human race, which is characterised by better ways to enact cruelty and ensure suffering. It is Dracula's aim to further this *bildung* through his collection and his creation of more and more vampires. His ultimate temptation lies not in the traditional association between vampirism and sexuality, but in providing his historians with the chance to 'live' history while recording it. He tempts Rossi with the promise: "Together we will advance the historian's work beyond anything the world has ever seen. There is no purity like the purity of the sufferings of history. You will have what every historian wants: history will be reality to you" (644). Progress is therefore happening, but not as the traditional Enlightenment narrative of progress suggests. Good is not progressing – evil is.

Dracula is, then, a truly Derridean revenant. He embodies a past that will also be the future, and realises the historical fear that evil, in the form of old regimes and old structures of power established through militarism and cruelty, will triumph. His vampirism and ambitions for the perfection of evil are aspects of a "future-to-come" (Derrida, *Specters* 45) that is already haunted by the legacy of human cruelty, and his ability to come back again and again to haunt the lives of the historians suggests the pervasiveness of evil even into the twenty-first century. Historical fear, in *The Historian*, lies in the evidence of the survivability

of evil, and its ability to haunt the present and the future with its promise of endurance. Dracula's library shows that seemingly "archaic forms of despotism and of superstition" (Baldick xix) survive into 'modern times'. The "hopes of the present" (Baldick xix) are stifled within the "dead-end" (Baldick xix) in this case not of physical incarceration, but of History itself. As Rossi suggests, "[t]he very worst impulses of humankind can survive generations, centuries, even millennia. And the best of our individual efforts can die with us at the end of a single lifetime" (Kostova 76). Dracula, his ambitions for the future and the legacy he leaves to the historians even after his second death, effectively realise the characters' historical fears. The historians attempt to contribute to a human narrative of progress that is meant to drive the species from bad to good, primitive to civilised. In other words, they are trying to engender in humans a greater *humanity*. However, the text suggests that this narrative is flawed because the Enlightenment's methods are ultimately not wholly good, as the grand narrative of progress would suggest, but can be turned to the advancement of evil. *The Historian* thus asserts that the evil narrative of progress surpasses and usurps the human narrative of progress, and it is suggested that – contrary to Enlightenment ideals – History will not end triumphantly with the abolishment of war and cruelty, but will continue to advance the human capacity for evil.

Knowledge as Progress for Evil

If historians are, as Certeau suggests, tasked with exorcising the past and making it understandable and palatable, Kostova's historians fail. The more research they do, the more evidence they uncover that proves how persistent, progressive and perfectible evil is. In *The Historian*, then, Kostova uses the tools of the Enlightenment – knowledge, epistemology and reason – to interrogate its narrative of progress. The archives depicted in her novel are a showcase of the "brightness of the Enlightenment" (69), but these archives illuminate both good and evil developments, and ultimately suggest that evil is not extinguished through reason, but, rather, can be sustained by it. Kostova illustrates the paradox of exorc-analysis: it does not work, and yet cannot be abandoned. While this revelation is perhaps not groundbreaking, Kostova's rendering of the three generic strains, Neo-Gothic, romance of the archive and *Bildungsroman*, serve to emphasise the Gothic assertion that darkness comes from humans rather than monsters. Moreover, *The Historian*'s Neo-Gothic critique of the narrative of progress suggests that that darkness persists, long past the Age of Enlightenment. Kostova successfully draws the history of evil into the twenty-first century when the

unnamed narrator truly comes into her Gothic inheritance. Now middle-aged, on a trip to a small library archive in Boston to examine Stoker's original notes on *Dracula*, as well as "an important medieval pamphlet" (697), the narrator receives her very own dragon book. Olson suggests that this "dark gifting is one surprise among many that lets Kostova cut a new moonlit path for the Gothic in our time, a way to escort Vlad Țepeș into our century" (296). *Dracula*'s book is still being distributed, which suggests his archive remains intact and that his legacy lives on.

Kostova therefore draws attention to the failings of History's attempts to put evil in the past. If Michel de Certeau's statement holds true and historians are required to "eliminate the danger of the *other*" (227), Kostova's historians once again fail. Instead, Kostova propagates Jerrold E. Hogle's notion that

[t]he Gothic clearly exists, in part, to raise the possibility that all 'abnormalities' we would divorce from ourselves are a part of ourselves, deeply and pervasively (hence frighteningly), even while it provides quasi-antiquated methods to help us place such 'deviations' at a definite, though haunting, distance from us. ("Gothic in Western Culture" 12).

In traditional Gothic novels this distance is achieved through the monster, and in romances of the archive it is usually created through the construction of the historic archive. As Keen suggests, the archive "conveniently serves as an automatic device of displacement that means 'not *us*, now, but *them*, back then'" (*Romances* 27). Kostova, however, erases this gap to illustrate the ongoing struggle between old and new, and to suggest that the 'old' is indeed haunting the new, in this case in the form of *Dracula* and his ambition to perfect evil. The revenant and his archive, as well as the very epistemological drives of the historians who seek it out, serve to obliterate any distance between past 'barbarism' and present 'civilisation'.

What the historians are meant to 'other' through research and epistemology proves only to be "part of ourselves, deeply and pervasively" (Hogle, "Gothic in Western Culture" 12).

Dracula's hauntology, his archive and the historians themselves therefore deconstruct the grand narrative of progress by disrupting the categories of good and evil and drawing attention to the fact that evil is much more human than supernatural. In this sense, *Dracula*'s hauntology presents a call for justice. Through his admiration of human evil and his collection that evidences its pervasiveness, *Dracula* challenges the characters and the reader to deny the 'truth' about history. Kostova's narrative thus suggests that humans are still struggling with their "primitive past" (Glover 6), that the "chamber of horrors" (Glover 6) cannot quite be relegated to the museum – or archive – because evil remains in the present, and will continue to haunt the future.

Chapter 4: American Dreams and Nightmares in Joyce Carol Oates's *The Accursed*

In Joyce Carol Oates's *The Accursed*, the notions of civilised and primitive are particularly brought to the fore. Oates uses these concepts to orchestrate a Gothic cusp that centres on turn-of-the-century America, when an ostensibly civilised society is punished for the oppression, in the name of progress, of black Americans and women. This focus on race is a particular characteristic of American Gothic fiction, which presents a critique of the American Dream by portraying nightmares spawned from white American settlers' pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. Oates depicts the historic costs of such a pursuit in the affluent university town of Princeton, New Jersey, where the 'founding families' suddenly become subjected to a curse that summons ghosts, vampires and demonic snakes to exact an (at first) unspecified revenge. In this Neo-Gothic novel, Oates interrogates the historical value of the American Dream, which has strong associations with the Enlightenment narrative of progress, through the ironic use of traditional Gothic and historical fiction conventions. Her tale includes various historical figures alongside the fantasy 'Bog Kingdom' and the supernatural haunting of a real American town. *The Accursed* clearly demonstrates the United States' historical fear of miscegenation and the uprising of the poor against the rich, but also the contemporary fear of the nature of humanity's progress and its resultant oppression of the Other by the (self-proclaimed) 'civilised'. Oates's characters propound themselves as 'modern', and often compare their manners and status with less 'desirable' elements of the American landscape, whom they mark as imposters or second-class citizens. However, the 'modern' white characters who think of themselves as civilised and progressive become haunted by the abject: that which they cast off to forge their new civilisation. In his seminal text on the American Gothic, Leslie Fiedler asks the question, "How could one tell where the American dream ended and the Faustian nightmare began [?]" (127). In *The Accursed*, Oates answers that there is no difference, that the American Dream is a Faustian nightmare predicated on committing evils for one's own benefit. This chapter will examine Oates's critique of the American Dream, which is achieved through the parodic use of traditional Gothic fiction conventions, the turn-of-the-century setting and a complex web of characters whose notions of civilisation are slowly broken down to reveal their own 'savagery' at heart.

Oates is renowned for her impressively prolific oeuvre, which stretches across several genres including poetry, plays, short stories and the novel. Ellen G. Friedman notes that “[o]ne of Joyce Carol Oates’s great accomplishments as a contemporary writer presenting the American landscape for almost half a century is her rich documentation of cultural shifts in the US” (478). *The Accursed*, one of her most recent novels, correlates with the rising racial tensions in twenty-first-century United States of America (USA). Although it was first drafted in the 1980s (Oates, “Strange Fruit” 104), its resurrection and distribution in 2013 shows the author’s continued concern with racism. Oates’s oeuvre is also marked by an “experimentalist aesthetic” (Cologne-Brookes, *Dark Eyes* 6) that has resulted in a wide range of both quality and type in her fiction. According to Gavin Cologne-Brooks, “[w]hat matter [for Oates] are not authoritative discourses, but innovation, creativity, and the possibilities of new forms of language and so new perspectives” (*Dark Eyes* 7). Her work, as Susana Araújo suggests, “defies pre-established views about the parameters of ‘serious’ writing, not only because of its astonishing prolixity but also for its ability to attract a popular readership” (92). Like Sarah Waters, Oates is a writer and a scholar, and has both written on and in the Gothic mode (Cologne-Brookes, “The Strange Case of Joyce Carol Oates” 304). Although Oates does not always write explicitly in the Gothic genre, her novels have been associated with American Gothic conventions in their expression of what David Punter calls “paranoiac fiction”, or fiction that places the reader in a situation of ambiguity with regard to fears within the text and that invites the reader to “share the doubts and uncertainties which pervade the apparent story” (*Literature of Terror V2* 183). This is most acutely realised in a loose series of books that Oates developed during the 1970s that constitute a ‘Gothic quintet’: *Bellefleur* (1980), *A Bloodsmoor Romance* (1982), *Mysteries of Winterthurn* (1984), *My Heart Laid Bare* (1998) and, eventually, *The Accursed* (2013). Although they are not all explicitly Gothic, they “explore the genres and social mores of the American nineteenth century” (Cologne-Brookes, *Dark Eyes* 96) in an overtly Gothic, albeit post-modern and ironised, mode.

These novels rework conventional genres like the Gothic romance, the detective story, the romance novel and the realist novel in order to facilitate a revision of conventional narratives. In this sense, Oates’s historical novels can be seen as historiographical metafiction. They are “intensively self-reflexive and yet parodically also lay claim to historical events and personages”, and as such exhibit “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs” – a notion that serves as “the grounds for [their] rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (Hutcheon 5). Cologne-Brookes

suggests that “they bear witness to and intervene in contemporary cultural debate in ways that can actually be of practical use to those who read them” (*Dark Eyes* 97). The first in this series, *Bellefleur* (1980), presents a thoroughly Gothic family drama that depicts “metamorphoses, strange manifestations, and mysterious spaces” that are “firmly grounded in American history” (Cologne-Brookes, “The Strange Case of Joyce Carol Oates” 308). Its representation of this history focuses particularly on the perpetuation of class differences in the ‘New World’, as well as race and gender issues that challenge the USA’s claim to an equal society. Oates’s interest in exposing the inequalities that belie the ‘land of the free’ continues in *The Accursed*, which centres on the apparently divine (or diabolical) retribution exacted from a wealthy Princeton family. Due to the relative newness of *The Accursed*, almost no critical work has been done on the novel. However, *The Accursed* does follow in the footsteps of the other novels in Oates’s quintet, and she revisits some of the themes expressed in *Bellefleur*, such as the family drama, a monstrous birth and the portrayal of supernatural events. Like *Bellefleur*, *The Accursed* “illustrates the inextricable enmeshment of fact, anecdote, and imagination that constitutes our inherently unstable and semi-illusory images of history and lineage” (Cologne-Brookes, *Dark Eyes* 100). Thus Oates, despite having a predominantly realist oeuvre, revisits the fantastical in *The Accursed* in order to present an account of history that ironises certainties and calls the narrative of the American Dream into question by attacking the very components of that dream: Christianity, democracy and progress. Her quintet closes as it opens – with a playful, stark and disturbing representation of an American Dream built on white supremacy and flawed notions of civilisation. She reworks traditional literary genres with characteristic postmodern affect in order to illustrate the cultural shifts in the country that presents itself as the bastion of democracy, freedom and equality.

Oates’s representation of the American Dream in *The Accursed* uses Gothic tropes to expose this national myth as a flawed ideal derived from an exclusionary concept of society and civilisation. Based on the myth of the ‘self-made man’ that characterised the forming of the USA, the American Dream was first used in the sense that we recognise today by James Truslow Adams. In the epilogue of *The Epic of America* (1931), he proclaims that the “American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank [...] is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world” (qtd. in Cullen 4). As Jim Cullen notes, this sparked a range of American dreams related to personal fulfilment, equality, social mobility, home ownership and sudden fortunes that make up the popular understanding of the American Dream today (7–9). When I use the term ‘the

American Dream', I am referring to this popular understanding of the concept that denotes a dream of success and belonging, which is achieved through material, social or cultural means. This chapter treats the American Dream as a narrative of progress derived from the Enlightenment narrative of progress, a notion clearly expressed in the rhetoric around the American Dream: Adams speaks of a *better, richer, and happier* society that sets itself apart as a 'New World' by being more progressive than the Old World. As Lawrence Buell explains, this dream espoused a "comparatively open and classless society" and the offering of bountiful resources that afforded better prospects for the average person than could be expected from "Old World hierarchicalism" (110). In this way, a "Great Society" could be built on the idea that "each man and woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable" (Adams qtd. in Buell 111). However, what the narrative of the American Dream often omits is that openness, classlessness and the attribution of stature were severely restricted. This dream, Buell elaborates, was first sold to white Protestant males of northern European origin during colonial times. With the systemic racism that accompanied colonial structures, a white man could "from modest or even severely disadvantaged beginnings [...] improve his position in life dramatically by dint of hard work, self-discipline, and good fortune" (Buell 110). The sense of what Americans were innately capable of was determined by race (white), gender (male) and – despite the American Dream narrative – class (middle to upper). Oates represents these tensions and shortcomings of the American Dream through her portrayal of the revenant, her characters' historical fears and the Gothic cusp.

In *The Accursed*, Oates focuses on the Slade family and moves her period of inquiry to the first decade of the twentieth century. In the novel, this decade has been concentrated into the years of 1905–06 for "purposes of aesthetic unity" (1) by the self-conscious, amateur historian narrator, M. W. Van Dyck II. The narrator writes in an attempt to give a chronicle of the 'Crosswicks Curse': a series of mysterious and unfortunate events that strikes the upper echelons of the Princeton community. Although the Curse has been documented before, in "for instance, Q. T. Hollinger's *The Unsolved Enigma of the Crosswicks Curse: A Fresh Inquiry* (1949), a compendium of truths, half-truths, and outright falsehoods published by a local amateur historian in an effort to correct the most obvious errors of previous historians (Tite, Birdseye, Worthing, and Croft-Crooke)" (Oates 1), the narrator writes to 'set the record straight' by providing a new history of the Curse. It is significant that Van Dyck signs his 'Author's Note' on 24 June 1984, around the time that Oates was working on her Gothic quintet and started drafting the "Crosswicks Horror" that would become *The Accursed*. This

self-conscious parodying of the author is in line with the postmodern elements of the novel that draw attention to Oates's construction of the narrator, who is as much 'acted upon' by the text and the reader as the 'accursed'. As a descendent of one of the afflicted families, Van Dyck feels uniquely qualified to present the true and faithful account of the mysterious happenings. His qualifications are bolstered by the possession of several 'primary texts' that include the letters and private journals of those effected by the Curse. *The Accursed* thus documents the unfolding of several tragedies that befall the prominent "West End" (1) families of the small university town of Princeton, in apparent reparation for the 'sins of the father',⁴⁶ but also of the community itself. During the span of this chronicle, Princeton's high society falls victim to demons, ghosts, vampires and strange creatures ranging from prehistoric birds to the Jersey Devil.⁴⁷ The foremost Princeton family, the Slades, becomes particularly plagued by misfortune following the sudden disappearance of a favourite daughter on her wedding day. Two generations of Slades, the offspring of the much-respected and highly accomplished Reverend Winslow Slade, suffer as the youngest generation is slowly picked off in mysterious ways. It is suggested that the Slade children – Josiah, Annabel, Todd and Oriana – are taken as recompense for Winslow Slade's deal, not with the Devil, but with God himself.

The Accursed presents a complex web of characters and events that produces a thoroughly American Gothic offering, which spirals in and out of focus in its excessive detail, its intricate associations and its intertextual references. Oates shows her familiarity with the Gothic genre in the excesses of the narrative, which parody both the traditional conventions as well as the American developments of Gothic fiction. In this sense, *The Accursed* is a thoroughly Neo-Gothic text, which revisits the 'original' Gothic, tracks Gothic fiction's development and then updates its forms and messages in order to present a critique of the grand narrative of progress. The novel's sense of historical fear as well as its depiction of the Gothic cusp rest on the reworking of American Gothic conventions and the narrator's carefully constructed, retrospective account of 1905–06 Princeton. As a Neo-Gothic text that particularly tackles American Gothic fiction conventions, Oates's representation of historical fear differs from the representations offered in *The Little Stranger* and *The Historian*. Although it still follows Chris Baldick's basic principle of portraying a fear that humans

⁴⁶ In this sense, *The Accursed* clearly echoes Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which takes punishment for the 'sins of the father' as its theme. *The Accursed*, however, broadens the theme and ultimately subverts it when the fathers are punished for their own sins, and the children come back to life.

⁴⁷ As the narrator is kind enough to explain in an extensive footnote, the Jersey Devil is a "legendary creature whose natural habitat is the Pine Barrens of South Jersey, reputedly a seven-foot predator bird/reptile with a long neck and a long, very sharp beak and sharp talons" (Oates 118).

cannot escape from the tyrannies of the past (xxii), the past in question is not only that of the Catholic Church, superstition and archaic forms of despotism, but also a more anthropological notion of a primal past. The founders of American Gothic fiction – generally white, male Americans – drew on frontier and escaped slave narratives (Crow xix) that vilified indigenous people, the natural obstacles to industrialisation and technological development, and the corruption of their ‘new-found’ utopia through the corruption of the (white) self. As such, American Gothic fiction represents context and subgenre-specific historical fears that manifest in three primary elements: the fear of the Other and miscegenation, the fear of the wilderness and the fear of the self. In order to evaluate Oates’s representation of historical fear in *The Accursed*, these elements must be briefly explained.

The American Gothic: Nightmares of the ‘New World’

Whereas *The Historian* carefully preserves an international flavour, *The Accursed* hinges on its treatment of an American turn-of-the-century community, and offers commentary on historical as well as present-day America through its Neo-Gothic elements. In describing the development of American fiction in his seminal *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1990), Fiedler states that “of all the fiction of the West, our own is most deeply influenced by the gothic, is almost essentially a gothic one” (124–125). Eric Savoy elaborates:

The perverse pleasures that acquired conventional status in the Gothic by the early nineteenth century – claustrophobia, atmospheric gloom, the imminence of violence – were generated in early American literature too, and by such standard architectural locales as the haunted house, the prison, the tomb, and by such familiar plot elements as the paternal curse and the vengeful ghost. (167)

However, as Fiedler notes, American Gothic fiction required a reworking of some of the traditional Gothic tropes in order to present a national brand of Gothic that reflected the unique American circumstances. As described in Chapter 1, British Gothic is deeply rooted in a specific set of socio-historical developments, images and tropes that could not simply be transplanted to the USA. This ‘New World’ lacked the ruins, papist history and aristocracy that feature so prominently in the ‘original’ Gothic, which derived many of its tropes from its primary setting in continental Europe. “After all,” Fiedler writes, “[the Gothic] had been invented to deal with the past and with history from a typically Protestant and enlightened point of view; but what could one do with the form in a country which, however Protestant and enlightened, had [...] neither a proper past nor a history?” (128). Thus while American Gothic fiction was based on the ‘original’ British Gothic, it had to develop its own set of tropes grounded in elements of American life, which would furnish a particularly American

set of historical fears. Fiedler suggests that the novels of Charles Brockden Brown, widely considered the father of American Gothic fiction, established these changes by substituting classical Gothic tropes with uniquely American ‘terrors’ (129). With these adjustments, the defining features of American Gothic fiction came to be its focus on issues of race, the fear of the wild and the fear of the self, all of which become intertwined with the national myth of the American Dream. The focus on these particular fears also filtered into the American Gothic form, most notably in its primary setting in the wild, its configuration of ‘American’ heroes versus ‘Othered’ villains and the focus on an uncertain and dubious self in its narrative situation. The following sections will explore Oates’s portrayal of these American fears through her representation of the tensions between ostensibly ‘modern’ characters like Woodrow Wilson, Annabel Slade and Winslow Slade, and the disruptive Gothic revenants.

Fear of the Racial Other

Critics agree that the focus on race is one of the defining characteristics of American Gothic fiction. In *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* (2003), Justin Edwards suggests that American Gothic fiction is “intimately tied to the history of racial conflict in the United States” (xvii). Following the work of Fiedler, Edwards explains that “the boundaries of the British gothic were defined by its fantastic, metaphysical, externalized, and class-based characteristics; whereas the parameters of the American gothic⁴⁸ were marked by its historical, psychological, internalized, and predominantly racial concerns” (145–46). These racial concerns manifested prominently in the work of Brown, whom Fiedler suggests substituted the traditionally patrician Gothic villain with the ‘savage’ Other, so that “not the aristocrat but the Indian [sic], not the dandified courtier but the savage colored man is postulated as the embodiment of villainy” (146). This “presumed monstrosity” of Africans and indigenous peoples bolstered America’s “Puritan exceptionalism” and was employed to justify slavery (Weinstock 42). Edwards proposes that it is slavery, in particular, that is “at the physical or conceptual center of the national imagination” of the USA, and that “the American gothic – like the nation itself – is haunted by slavery” (xviii). Accordingly, the family drama and Gothic obsession with inheritance take on a racial dimension in American Gothic fiction, “where miscegenation inspired the fear expressed in the racist discourse of the

⁴⁸ As is noted in Chapter 1, critics often use ‘Gothic’ and ‘Gothic fiction’ interchangeably. Edwards here refers to American Gothic fiction as a textual genre, rather than a particularly American strain of the Gothic mode. American scholars also tend to favour spelling ‘Gothic’ with a lower case ‘g’ in accordance with American English. Their spelling has been preserved in quotes, but this thesis will continue to use ‘Gothic’ with a capital ‘g’ in accordance with South African English convention.

‘affront to white womanhood’ [...], and an anxiety about the imagined moral and physical decay of the nation” (Edwards xxv). In structural terms, then, American Gothic fiction constructed a set of binaries around race that corresponded to notions of civilisation and the primitive as well as good and evil. The white heroes were aligned with the civilised and the good, while any person ‘Other’ to them was aligned with the primitive and evil. These binaries are often extolled by the characters of *The Accursed*, who tacitly support white supremacy and believe themselves to be the progressive bastions of civilisation whose task it is to protect the white race and enlighten the world about the righteousness of Christianity and democracy (Oates 350).

As with other forms of Gothic fiction, the fear of the Other is played out in the interaction between hero and villain. However, early American Gothic fiction usually portrayed a white, (often) male hero faced with a villain whose Otherness is frequently determined by his or her race. In terms of the Gothic cusp, then, the modern characters are often white Americans, while the Gothic characters are African American, Native American⁴⁹ or hybrid monsters whose ontologies are suggestive of American fears of miscegenation and the Other (Weinstock 42–43). Teresa Goddu characterises this as a “discourse of racial demonisation” (“American Gothic” 71), which transforms the racial Other (to the “white, able-bodied norm” [Weinstock 44]) into a Gothic monster. There are numerous examples⁵⁰ of this demonisation of racial ‘Others’ in *The Accursed*, not least in the characterisation (by the narrator and white characters) of the novel’s main revenant: the “demon girl” (Oates 130), Pearl. This revenant presents a mysterious conflation of two murdered black women closely tied to the Curse. In the first instance, the revenant represents the unnamed female victim of a lynching in a nearby town. In the second, it represents the murdered Pearl, a victim of Reverend Winslow Slade’s desire and shame. The “demon girl” only physically appears once in the novel, when she is described as

of slender proportions, indeed wraith-like, with long and unruly dark hair, and a round, dusky-skinned, sharp-boned face; and dark eyes that seemed to blaze with passion. The

⁴⁹ The use of terminology here is based on the terms favoured by scholars on American Gothic fiction. Although these categories and terms are problematic, these sections are intended to give a sense of how traditional American Gothic fiction viewed race. These terms have been chosen as the least offensive options.

⁵⁰ Future President Woodrow Wilson, whose obvious racism is associated with the initiation of the Crosswicks Curse, expresses exactly this demonisation of racial ‘Others’ in the ways in which his perspective shifts as it is revealed that his cousin, Yaeger Ruggles, is of mixed-descent. As the scene progresses, Wilson’s focalisation starts to transform Ruggles from a ruffled and concerned preceptor into a grimacing “gargoyle” (Oates 19) whose “eyes were not so attractive now but somewhat protuberant, like the eyes of a wild beast about to leap” (17). He later thinks about the times that his promising “young kinsman” (Oates 10) enjoyed the Wilsons’ hospitality, and this immediately inspires a sense of horror at allowing Ruggles to mix with his “household of *females*” (20, her emphasis).

girl was very coarsely dressed in what appeared to be work-clothes, that had been badly soiled, torn, or even burnt. The fingers of her right hand appeared to be misshapen, or mangled. Most remarkably, small flames lightly pulsed about the girl: now lifting from her untidy hair, now from her tensed shoulders, now from her outstretched hand! [...]. More remarkably still, around the girl's neck was a coarse rope, fashioned into a noose; the length of the rope about twelve feet, and its end blackened as from a fire. (Oates 129)

Her ruined fingers will be revealed as a marker of Pearl's physiology, while the noose strongly suggests that she also represents the woman hanged by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) before the events in the novel begin. It is suggested that this revenant is the source of the Curse, even though it only manifests in the text once. This revenant will be discussed in more detail as the chapter progresses, but her treatment and characterisation reflects turn-of-the-century American discourses on race, miscegenation and women. In *The Accursed*, she realises the white, 'modern' characters' fear of the racial 'Other' by haunting them with the physical manifestation of white oppression and the atrocities committed against black women.

Fear of the Primitive Wild

The racial tensions that brood under the narrator's telling of the Crosswicks Curse play off against the backdrop of a setting typical to American Gothic fiction. Just as the aristocratic Gothic villain is replaced with the 'savage', so the castle and dungeon are substituted with "the haunted forest (in which nothing is what it seems) and the cave, the natural pit or abyss from which man struggles against great odds to emerge" (Fiedler 147). The Crosswicks Curse accordingly moves between the mansions of Princeton's West End – particularly, Crosswicks Manse, "the family estate of the Slades" (Oates 22) – and the forest and bog that surround Princeton. The juxtaposition of these two settings, one urban or built-up and one wild or uncultivated, serves to further entrench the binary discussed above, in which an allegedly 'civilised', white hero faces a 'primitive' Other who is associated with the wilderness. In American Gothic fiction, "the heathen, unredeemed wilderness and not the decaying monuments of a dying class, nature and not society becomes the symbol of evil" (Fiedler 147). This notion is supported by Punter, who notes that the "contrast between the wilderness and the 'handiwork of man'" is one of the major tropes of American Gothic fiction ("Gothic, Theory, Dream" 19). He further describes this as "a narrative of the "triumph [...] of civilization over barbarism" that "suppressed indigenous voices" ("Gothic, Theory, Dream" 20). The Gothic cusp in American Gothic fiction thus often foregrounds the spatial element as representative of its clash between old and new. The division between a 'civilised' town

and the primordial wilderness is cast in much starker terms than the couple of centuries' difference between the castle and the bourgeois heroine. Although the primordial wilderness still holds a sense of attraction in its mystery, this attraction is based on the need to explore and investigate. It is a much clearer case of an abject space that must be purged or defeated in order for the subject to progress. Early American Gothic texts then portrayed a historical fear of the 'primitive' that was expressed through the representation of the wilderness, which acted as a secondary villain threatening the self-proclaimed 'civilised' American subject.

This fear of the primordial, untamed wilderness encroaching upon the hard-won American 'civilisation' is palpable in *The Accursed*, which represents the 'wild' through images and objects associated with nature. It is the intrusion of the 'wild' or the 'natural' into the homes and offices of Princeton's West End that allows the Curse access to its victims. Annabel Slade first meets her 'demon lover' in the Crosswicks garden, a liminal space between civilisation and the wild; Josiah Slade takes mysteriously tainted lilies to Professor Pearce van Dyck, infecting him with the Curse; Woodrow Wilson is tempted by his 'angelic' mistress in the "wooded acres beyond Battle Road" (582); and Todd Slade encounters the "demon girl" in the Crosswicks Forest. The "paludal wilderness" (Oates 476) is also the place where the corpses of those murdered are dumped, and the space from which the revenants of the novel emanate. Although the various characters see these wildernesses as domesticated and brought to heel as "the forested property belonging to the Slades" (Oates 118), they prove to be much more disruptive and dangerous than expected. The wilderness is where the Slade children become lost, encounter the supernatural or succumb to the elements. As Matthew Wynn Sivils notes, "[e]ntering the American wilderness [...] is as much about risking dehumanization and insanity as it is about the threat of Native Americans or animals. It is about the spiritual peril of traversing a land haunted by the specters of national injustice and hypocrisy" (90). The forest and bog thus become Gothic spaces that 'test' the Slade children by exposing them to revenants whose hauntologies recall the injustices of American history. In these spaces, the Slade children are forced to question their understandings of civilisation, humanity and progress as they are confronted by the spectralised horrors of America's past.

Fear of the Corrupted Self

The fear of the racial 'Other' and of the primitive wilderness contribute to a fear of the corruption of the self, which, in traditional American Gothic fiction, was recognised almost exclusively in the white American subject. The "dead hand" of history, located by these narratives in the 'primitive nature' of the racial 'Other' and the wilderness, thus threatens to

taint the civilised self who is meant to represent the ideal of a new, pure society. In this sense, the influence of the early Puritan settlers is inescapable. As Cullen relates, Puritans (among others) constructed early American national myths that rendered the land as a utopia where humanity could be reformed. The ‘New World’ was meant for pure and worthy souls who chose to abandon the decadences of the ‘Old World’ for the hardship of worshipping God in the ‘right’ way – the Puritan way (Cullen 16–18). This notion greatly influenced what would become known as “American exceptionalism”, or the “belief that the country’s essential innocence and its destiny place it above the constraints and judgments of other nations and of history” (Crow xviii). This construction of the American national myth resulted in a fear not only of the external influences mentioned above, but also of the corrupted self who is unworthy of the American Dream, which manifested particularly in the “Puritan paranoia about the Satanic pact” (Ringel 141). Faye Ringel explains that this legacy of Puritanism resulted in a species of Gothic fiction that presented “narratives of the fall from grace of those settlers, of inbred families, cruelty, and generational hauntings [that] combined nostalgia for a medieval or colonial golden age with a stronger belief that from the past come horror and evil” (139).⁵¹ American Gothic fiction thus carries its own simultaneous reverence and mistrust of the past. Like British Gothic fiction, it evokes history with a sympathetic eye, but ultimately aims to exorcise that which holds the subject back – that which can corrupt the purity and goodness of the ‘New World’. In the Puritan conception, all of this became concentrated in the threat of Satan. Puritan paranoia brought with it a fanatical fear of the devil “who delighted in tempting good Puritans” (140). The revenant of traditional American Gothic fiction is thus not simply a transgressive spirit or wily vampire, but is oftentimes directly associated with Judeo-Christian understandings of evil. The ghost or monster is consequently not merely a natural aberration, but also a Satanic manifestation.

However, this manifestation is not so much feared for its monstrousness as it is dreaded for the threat of corruption that it poses to the white American subject. Goddu quotes Joseph Bodzioc in saying that “the American gothic replaced the social struggle of the European with a Manichean struggle between the moral forces of personal and communal order and the howling wilderness of chaos and moral depravity” (33 qtd. In Goddu, *Gothic America* 9). The American Gothic thus expressed a fear of discovering the unworthiness of the American subject, which was clearly illustrated in the Puritan paranoia about corruption

⁵¹ Although Ringel here specifically refers to what she calls “New England Gothic” (139), its main principles can be applied to *The Accursed* which, despite falling outside of the New England area, exhibits many of the traits associated with New England Gothic. Indeed, the ‘founding families’ of Princeton are the descendants of those New England settlers who moved toward the Trenton area (Oates 35).

expressed in the fear of a “Faustian bargain” (Ringel 141). Fictions like Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) illustrate a fear of the impurities that lurk within the chosen American community. The unworthy subject seeks his or her fortune and happiness through the Devil instead of God. This taint was also related to other sins and deprivations eschewed in Puritan belief, such as expressions of sexuality,⁵² which were also configured as corruption and unworthiness. Despite the belief in forgiveness and atonement, historical events like the Salem Witch Trials of 1692–3 suggest that the fear of corruption outstripped faith in the power of redemption (Ringel 140). The fear of the corrupted self filtered into the broader American psyche as it is represented in American Gothic fiction, and eventually moved beyond religious confines to more secular understandings of psychology and subjectivity. However, Oates’s representation of this fear is directly related to Puritan paranoia as it filtered into the Puritans’ more immediate descendants. Although the characters of *The Accursed* are largely Presbyterian, they exhibit the same paranoia and exclusionary ethic as their rigid ancestors. The Puritan past thus continues to haunt the ‘modern’ characters in *The Accursed*.

This fear of the corrupted self is, once again, addressed in several ways in *The Accursed*. It is often expressed by the white characters whose attitudes and ideologies are deeply vested in Christian theology. Characters like Woodrow Wilson often reference the demonic and exhibit paranoia regarding the infiltration of evil into their Christian society. Wilson expresses some Puritan rigidity when he states that “evil begins in compromise” (Oates 32). He explains:

Our great President Lincoln did not compromise with the slavers, as our Puritan ancestors did not compromise with the native Indians whom they discovered in the New World, pagan creatures who were not to be trusted – ‘drasty Sauvages’ they were called. (Oates 32–33)

Wilson also becomes convinced that “Evil appears in our midst” (42) when members of the Princeton community begin moving against him in university politics. He accuses his rivals

⁵² Sexual ‘corruption’ is most clearly represented in the narrator’s portrayal of Annabel, who Van Dyck suggests is seduced by Axson Mayte because she harbours illicit desires. The narrator, and Annabel herself, accordingly construe her time in the Bog Kingdom as a punishment for her ‘deviance’. It is significant that Mayte draws her away a moment after her vows to Lt. Dabney Bayard are completed. She is then a virginal bride whisked away before the consummation of her lawful marriage, who then willingly commits adultery. Annabel’s acquiescence to Mayte defies the expectations placed upon her by the good, Christian Princeton society. Van Dyck makes much of the contrast presented at the scene of Annabel’s confession, between the girlish Victorian style-room and the “grotesquely” (Oates 261) pregnant Annabel. Her failure to fulfil the ideal of white American womanhood is emphasised through the narrator’s constant reference to this contrast, as well as her ‘imprisonment’ in her wedding gown, which “become[s] a kind of nightgown, or housecoat” (271). Her “dazzling-white bridal gown [...] had become soiled, rumped and torn”, a condition that mirrors her transition from Princeton’s beloved daughter to Axson Mayte’s lover. Annabel’s confession then realises the fear of ‘impurity’ in the ‘best’, and she is consequently degraded and dehumanised to a hellish extreme.

of consorting with those who might summon the Devil and practise “mesmerism” and “animal magnetism” (43). He also tells Ruggles that “[t]here are barbarous places in this country, as well as in the world – at times, a spirit of infamy – evil...” (Oates 15). Another prominent character, the invalid Adelaide Burr, delights in the notion of “the UNSPEAKABLE in our midst” (97). In another instance, the heir to the Slade fortune – Josiah – begins to hear voices and starts to fear his own capacity for evil. The voices urge Josiah to burn down Crosswicks Manse, and finally ‘triumph’ when he flings himself into the Arctic Ocean. The paranoia climaxes in Professor Pearce Van Dyck’s attempt to kill his infant son. Professor Van Dyck, the father of the narrator, becomes convinced that his wife’s baby is in fact the spawn of demons. M. W. Van Dyck does not comment on this occasion extensively, but the suggestion that the narrator himself might be a product of the Curse adds a significant layer to his already obvious unreliability. Through these instances, among others, Oates illustrates the dominating fear of the corrupted self that her ‘modern’ characters experience. She, perhaps gleefully, realises this fear in her portrayal of the corruption not only of the Princeton members influenced by the Curse, but also of their noble patriarch, Winslow Slade. In this figure and his interaction with Pearl, Oates brings together the three fears discussed here to orchestrate a critique of the American Dream. This will be discussed in more detail as the chapter progresses.

Historical Fears and the Dream of Utopia

The fears discussed above, then, form a contrast to the often referenced American Dream. They are products of the attitudes applied to America by its early European settlers, who viewed the land as a ‘virgin’ territory onto which their dreams could be built. Scholars on the American Dream often reference the sense of utopia that accompanied ideological and religious expeditions. As Fiedler explains, “A dream of innocence had sent Europeans across the ocean to build a new society immune to the compounded evil of the past from which no one in Europe could ever feel himself free” (127). This need for a new beginning is rooted in the “foundational fictions and self-mythologizations” of early Americans, which entailed a sense of “new-world innocence” and a claim to “purity and equality” (Goddu, *Gothic America* 10) that could not be achieved in the ‘Old World’. The historical fears discussed above constitute that which was abjected through this ideological approach. The ‘untamed’ wilderness threatens the building of a ‘civilised’, industrialised society. The racial ‘Other’ threatens the purity of the white American subject through the threat of equality and competition. The corrupted self threatens the dream of a better, brighter future by giving itself

over to 'evil'. These fears represent what the narrative of the American Dream, at least in its historical stages, eschews and attempts to defeat. However, as has been stated, the abject is never wholly abjected, and these aspects continue to haunt the boundaries of the white American subject, threatening "epistemological certainties" and "identifactory borders" (Edwards xxx). The 'Gothic' characters of American Gothic fiction embody these fears, and thus threaten the purity and advancement of the white American nation, which in turn threatens the foundational myth of a 'New Utopia'. *The Accursed* is set at a time during which this 'New Utopia' was thought to have been achieved – at the turn of the century in the Northern United States. At this point in time, the main characters – white, educated, upper-class residents of Princeton – believe themselves to be modern, civilised and superior, particularly in comparison to their Southern compatriots and other races. These are thus the 'modern' characters of Oates's Gothic cusp, who become haunted by the evidence that they are not as 'civilised' as they purport to be.

The Accursed then highlights the doubts that come with the American Dream, with a particular emphasis on the cost of realising it. As in British Gothic fiction, early American Gothic fiction exorcised the fears detailed above to encourage a narrative of progress in which the American Dream could be realised, even as it presented counter-narratives "recording fear, failure, despair, nightmare, crime, disease, and madness" (Crow xviii). As such, it shows how the American Dream often turns into an American nightmare and how these are, as Savoy points out, deeply and irrevocably intertwined (167). To reiterate Fiedler, "How could one tell where the American Dream ended and the Faustian nightmare began; they held in common the hope of breaking through all limits and restraints, of reaching a place of total freedom where one could with impunity deny the Fall, live as if innocence rather than guilt were the birthright of all men" (127). This sort of renegade hope for a state of innocence feeds into the historical fears discussed above, which above all relate to the fear of this dream being corrupted and compromised. *The Accursed* presents the narrative of this corruption and compromise in painstaking detail.

Caprices of the Soul: The Revenants of *The Accursed*

The 'Gothic' characters in *The Accursed* accordingly appear as various incarnations of evil, which haunt the modern characters by realising the historical fears discussed above and by calling attention to historical injustices. These characters are supernatural or spectral in nature, and present something of a departure from the traditional revenant. The first to appear

is the “demonic Axson Mayte” (Oates 170). Although Mayte’s exact nature is not revealed, he seems to harbour powers over time as well as other people’s minds, and seems to be the executor of the Curse.⁵³ While seducing Annabel, he appears to those whom he wishes to charm as a sophisticated Virginian gentleman. Others, like Josiah Slade, see him in his (presumably) true form: “a singularly ugly man [...], with a flaccid skin, fish-belly-white, and close-set eyes of some intense though unnatural-seeming color like bronze; and a reptilian manner about the lips, his tongue quick-darting and moist, as he smiled an unctuous smile” (Oates 88). The association of Mayte with snakes and other reptiles is strengthened throughout the novel, and this association, as well as his role as temptor of the ‘pure’ Annabel, associates him with common conceptions of the Devil. In fact, he is often called the devil (Oates 175), and presides over the Bog Kingdom as presumably Satan presides over Hell. Mayte is thus positioned in the role of Satan, the punisher of human sins. It must be noted, however, that his punishments are as unfair as they are cruel: the sins of the father are visited upon his children, and Annabel’s awakening desire is punished with rape, forced bestiality and servitude. Mayte fulfils the promise of the voice that warns Winslow Slade during his encounter with ‘Pearl’: “*You are of the Slades, you boast to all the world that you are a Slade, yet Reverend we shall see if you are not brought down to Hell*” (Oates 447).

Once Mayte is identified as the demon who abducted Annabel, a new strange figure appears on the Princeton social scene: Count English von Gneist, a mysterious but “well-born gentleman” (205) from Europe. Through gossip, it is revealed that the Count is from “an ancient noble family in a region of central Europe called Wallachia, a former principality of Romania” (205). This implicit reference to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is compounded when it becomes clear that the Count is of a vampiric ilk. Although he does not exhibit the physical characteristics of a vampire, he does thirst for blood, and inspires a similar thirst in the women (and men) whom he seduces. Princeton is suddenly subjected to a new spate of murders, this time of young attractive men, who notice bat-like shapes and curious vapours (Oates 496), and who die of exsanguination (477). The Count also haunts the women of

⁵³ This is suggested by the fact that Mayte appears when the Curse is meant to start, and is strongly associated with its initiation when he tempts Annabel away from her wedding. The narrator also very strongly insinuates a link between Mayte and Winslow Slade, in emphasising the simultaneity of their deaths. The Curse ends when Todd Slade chops off Mayte’s head after beating him at a game of draughts. At the same time, Winslow Slade dies in front of his congregation, when a snake forces itself down his throat. Moreover, Slade dumps Pearl’s body in what would become, or in another realm already is, the Bog Kingdom, and it is this act of murder that evokes the Curse to begin with. Slade is also aligned with Satan or God’s antagonist by God himself, when he suggests that Slade is his “TWIN” (657) just as Judas is the twin of Jesus (653). The connections forged between Mayte, Slade and God complicate Judeo-Christian conceptions of good and evil, and suggest that there is no strict division between the two, at least in traditional terms.

Princeton with promises of nobility, distinction and the sort of romance that might feature in popular reading of the time: he is handsome, noble and exotic, and presents a personal history fraught with peril, gloom and romantic abandon (205). Several Princeton 'ladies' become convinced that the Count will elope with them, once their husbands are dispatched, and he visits at least one in a "spectral, or immaterial, form" (567). The Count then also succeeds in bringing out the repressed sadism of Lieutenant Dabney Bayard, who is urged to satisfy his bloodthirsty appetites through violence. Bayard is tempted with the suggestion: "*Isn't it preferable, Lieutenant, to satisfy your appetite, and acknowledge the pleasure it gives you? And not, like most of those who surround us, enact a pious hypocrisy each day of your life?*" (Oates 475). Accordingly, Bayard "[follows] the caprice of his secret soul" (Oates 475) by viciously attacking, raping and murdering two students. As the second victim describes the first: "In addition to having his throat slashed by the teeth of human, or animal, origin, the luck-less young man had been made to endure an offense to his body, of an 'unspeakable' sort" (470). Count von Gneist thus carries on Mayte's role of tempting the inhabitants of Princeton's West End, but does so on a broader scale and with more violent results. His success and likability suggest something of the charm of the Old World, even when it is fraught with violence, destruction and atrocity. Von Gneist embodies the aristocratic ideals ostensibly rejected by the espousers of freedom, democracy and equality in the USA, and yet, his influence is perhaps the most devastating in the novel.

Lastly, the inhabitants of Princeton's West End are plagued by spectral visitations from their dead daughters. In fact, the first evidence of supernatural happenings comes with the collapse of former president Grover Cleveland, who sees his long-dead daughter Ruth beckoning from a rooftop (Oates 80). It becomes apparent that, ostensibly since the lynching in Camden, various Princeton inhabitants have been dreaming of dead girls who attempt to enter their houses through second-floor windows (216). Annabel herself appears as a spirit to several Princeton inhabitants during her time in the Bog Kingdom, including her grandfather and her cousin Oriana, each time precipitating disaster. Winslow Slade suffers a severe stroke when he is visited by a ghostly Annabel, who begs him to "*intercede with your God for me!*" (238, her emphasis), and Oriana is found dead soon after she tells her brother, Todd, about her dreams (431). These spectres serve as warnings, but also as agitators who spur on the paranoia of the Princetonians and feed the rumours of a Curse. It is the spectral vision of Annabel that tempts Josiah to jump into the Arctic to save her, while a spectral Oriana and Ruth call to Grover Cleveland to "Play with us now! Tell no one but come play with us now!" (438) during Oriana's funeral. In these spectral forms, the beloved daughters of

Princeton become Othered, unhomed as well as unhoming, and abject. As the ‘futures’ of the prominent West End families, they haunt the Princetonians by realising the fear of corruption entrenched in the historic fears of the wild and the other. Their hauntologies transform the once most-beloved and innocent members of Princeton into temptresses and evil beings who defy the law of God and nature as the Princetonians know them. It is also significant that the spectres are the white, female children of the West End. They are beloved and sorely missed, not just by their families, but by the Princeton community itself. In this way, they stand in stark contrast to the victims of the historical injustices perpetrated in the area: uncounted, nameless black women who suffered rape, murder and enslavement throughout American history. As Woodrow Wilson’s cousin, Yaeger Ruggles, points out, no one in Princeton’s high society is willing to speak out against the horror of lynching (15). Moreover, no one in Princeton’s high society seems to care very much about the victims of lynching or, once Winslow Slade ‘confesses’ to involvement in Pearl’s murder,⁵⁴ the black victim of gruesome exploitation and indifferent slaughter. The Curse thus makes victims, and villains, of Princeton’s white daughters as punishment for the ‘sins of the father’.

Despite their varied incarnations, the revenants of *The Accursed* have one thing in common: they work through influence and temptation rather than direct action. As the narrator explains, “so far as Josiah can see, and he has sought out his enemy in many places, the Fiend does not exactly *exist*” (Oates 462). The monsters in their midst, then, are conjured from their own secret desires, fears and obsessions. Through their uncertain and unclassifiable ontologies, the revenants disrupt the ‘modern’ characters’ enactment of society, to show the savagery under their thin veneer of civilisation. Their hauntologies call the values of Princeton’s West End into question, and reveal the greed, lust, hypocrisy and envy that permeate their ‘civilisation’. Mayte and Von Gneist embody the temptations associated with both the ‘Old Europe’ and the ‘Old America’. In his disguise as a Southern gentleman, Mayte is able to charm the majority of Princeton. He represents what Woodrow Wilson thinks of as “a way of civilization that was superior to its conqueror’s” (21). Von Gneist, on the other hand, brings the decadences of the ‘Old country’ to the new, and draws out the “American idolatry of European pretensions” (Oates 413). The reception he receives reveals the admiration for permanence and tradition that Samuel Taylor Coleridge comments on, and displays the complex yearning for and disgust at the past that these ‘modern’ Americans

⁵⁴ As the narrator takes pains to reveal, this first confession from Winslow Slade is not a truthful version of events. It brands Henri Selincourt, a pimp, as the murderer, and Slade as an unfortunate bystander whose greatest crime was miscegenation and dishonesty. As will be discussed, Slade is in fact the murderer, and kills Pearl out of shame for his ‘transgression’ of having sex with a girl of mixed-descent.

embody. The 'New Utopia' has thus not cast off the yoke of 'Old World' evils, but continues to perpetuate the divisions and decadences of Old Europe. These two demonic figures then embody the fear of the self that permeates American Gothic fiction, as well as the fear of history and the Other. They manifest historical prejudices and desires, and haunt Princeton with its society's shortcomings. The spectral daughters, on the other hand – through the characterisations of their deaths as freak accidents caused by nature, the wild or the demonic – realise the fear of both the Other and of the wild.

These instances of haunting, while arousing horror in some, spark a rabid need to explain the strange occurrences in others. Professor Van Dyck, the narrator's father, is so effected by the Curse that his whole life becomes consumed by the need to rationalise the events. As he becomes increasingly obsessed, Van Dyck exhibits the drive for exorc-analysis, and claims that "the Curse must be countered head-on, by a stratagem of *rationality*" (Oates 389, her emphasis). In this way, he attempts to conjure away the Curse by proclaiming: "Ratiocination – our Salvation" (315). Professor Van Dyck recognises that "[e]vil has been erupting, emerging" (391), and feels as though he can save the community if he can rationally deduce the cause of the Curse. Even though the evil with which he is confronted is "so extreme so powerful mortal Reason cannot comprehend" (Oates 400), this does not stop Professor Van Dyck from obsessing over his "Scheme of Clues" and believing that the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle can provide a model for deduction that will enable him to solve the Curse (311). In this delirium, he is visited by (or perhaps conjures) Sherlock Holmes, or a man who claims to be the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes, and is convinced to "*eradicate*" (Oates 416) the manifestation of the Curse within his own home: his infant son. However, ratiocination proves to be a false salvation: Van Dyck is unable to solve the mystery of the Curse, and his "Scheme of Clues" never escapes his own obsession with the paternity of the baby. Ultimately, his flawed ratiocination and the prompts of 'Sherlock Holmes' result in his own demise when, while attempting to exorcise the Curse by killing the baby, he is knocked to the floor and dies. The exorc-analysis, as in *The Little Stranger* and *The Historian*, fails to exorcise the revenants, who defy the conventional conceptions of both ontology and epistemology.

Oates's revenants are perhaps more Kristevan than Derridean, even though their hauntologies fulfil the characteristics of the spectre that Derrida discusses. Nonetheless, their ontologies represent not only the disruption of time and being, but disruptions of civilisation and self. They represent "a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives" (Kristeva 10). What should be abjected – primal urges toward violence,

sex and superiority at all costs – are embraced at the behest of these revenants, who themselves represent what is abjected in narratives of the American Dream. The revenants, then, represent the ‘American Nightmares’ configured as the historical fears discussed above. Through the revenants, Princeton is confronted not only with the Other, but with the ‘primitive’ that springs from its own midst. Their fathers, mothers, sons and daughters are seduced into “those fragile states where man [sic] strays on the territories of *animal*” (Kristeva 12, her emphasis), and they are themselves exposed as failed exorcisms of the past. Despite the narrator’s frequent reference to Princetonians’ notion of civilisation as vested in the white upper-classes of America – as opposed to immigrants, African Americans, Jews and “Free Thinkers” (435) – their claims to civilisation, rationalism, progressiveness and goodness are systematically refuted, and their own ‘savagery’ and ‘primitive natures’ are brought to the fore. This is compounded by the undercurrent of racial injustice that manifests itself in the “demon girl” (130), the spectral black woman who appears to Todd Slade in Crosswicks Forest and represents both the lynched woman and the murdered girl ‘Pearl’, to whom Winslow Slade attributes the Curse (450). Although this revenant only appears once, it is she who haunts the entire narrative and whose hauntology presents a call to justice that still remains to be answered by modern-day Americans.

A Dream Corrupted: Faustian Deals with God

The corruption of the American Dream is laid bare in Winslow Slade’s confession, a semi-maniacal exposition of the hypocrisy that underlies the Slades’, and by extension the ‘New World’s’, claims to greatness. As mentioned above, Slade is one of the foremost figures in the Princeton community. The narrator relates that, “In Princeton, a far more civilized community than the state capitol in Trenton, Winslow Slade was generally revered as a much-beloved pastor of the Presbyterian church and community leader” (27). Retired by the time of the Curse, Slade had become “one of New Jersey’s most prominent citizens”, “by nature congenial” and “in every way a Christian” (27). He presents a “blend of authority, manly dignity, compassion and Christian forbearance” (34) inherited from his particularly American pedigree of seventeenth century Puritan settlers and eighteenth century Scots-English traders (35). As such, the Slades belonged to the upper echelons of even the West End of Princeton. However, the narrative steadily reveals that the ‘good Christian’ Slades

earned their fortune through slavery, and that Winslow Slade is himself the root cause⁵⁵ for the visitation of the Curse upon Princeton. It is in Slade's final confession that Oates delivers her most direct attack on the narrative of the American Dream, and thus his confession will form a significant point of analysis in this section.

In "The Covenant", a sermon prepared but never delivered, Slade confesses to murder, miscegenation, perjury and hypocrisy, and reveals that his successes and achievements are the fruits of a Faustian deal struck with God himself. Slade claims that Pearl, a young prostitute and mill-worker "*of mixed race*" (445, her emphasis), "dared to 'caress' him" (446) and "SEDUCED [him]", "[AROUSING] SUCH HELLISH DESIRE IN [HIM], IT WAS NOT TO BE BORN" (651). Once he has strangled Pearl, God taunts him:

WHAT WICKEDNESS HAVE YOU WORKED UPON THE FEMALE MY FINE LAD WHAT BIT OF NAUGHTINESS HAVE YOU PERFORMED IN SECRET AS ALL OF THE SLADES PERFORM IN SECRET FROM YOUR DAYS OF SLAVE-HOLDING UNTIL NOW YOUR GREAT FORTUNE WHICH IS THE LORD'S BLESSING HARVESTED FROM BENT AND BROKEN BACKS OF FACTORY WORKERS, MILL-WORKERS, DUMB AND STAMMERING IMMIGRANTS MISSING FINGERS, TOES, EYES YET YOU HAVE TRIED TO TRICK YOUR GOD YOU HAVE TRIED TO DISGUISE YOUR SIN AS IF IT WERE A MERE CRIME. (652-3)

God thus reveals the source of the Slades' fortune in the misery and oppression of others. The Slades only live the American Dream because, as God tells him, "THE GIRL PEARL DIED THAT YOU MIGHT LIVE, AND PROSPER; EACH DAY AT CROSSWICKS, YOU WALK UPON HER BONES MOLDERING IN THE SOIL" (662). This "COVENANT" (655), which allows Slade fifty years to "EXERCISE WHAT TRIFLING GOOD, OR FURTHER HARM, YE WILL" (655), keeps the "FURIES OF HEAVEN, THE AVENGING ANGELS" (655) at bay while Slade does God's work. It allows him to entrench himself in American politics and gain wealth and acclaim. He is elected as Governor of New Jersey through "SHAMELESS BALLOT-STUFFING" and becomes entangled in sordid corporate deals that result in "BODIES FLOATING IN THE DELAWARE ROTTED AND SWARMING WITH MAGGOTS" (663). As a 'man of the church, he "SLYLY [SOWS] SCHISM" (661) and "[PREACHES] DISCORD" (658). The various demons discussed above are then revealed to be not devils, but God's angels, and God himself is revealed as a purveyor of evil rather than good, which he enacts through his flock's belief in the American Dream.

⁵⁵ Although *The Accursed* does relate the various injustices and hypocrisies of other prominent characters, Slade's confession reveals that he is at least the initiating factor, whose deal with God results in the setting loose of Axson Mayte, Count von Gneist and the various revenants and demons throughout the novel.

Oates then constructs a reversal of traditional Judeo-Christian understandings of good and evil: the demons are angels, God is the Devil and the white, ‘civilised’ inhabitants of Princeton are merely the dupes worshipping the forces of evil that privilege their advance in return for blind obedience. Slade explains:

THIS BEING THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS WITH WHOM HE HAS FORGED A COVENANT TO DISGUISE THE WORKINGS OF EVIL ON EARTH WITH A PACIFIST SMILE AND IN THIS WAY TO PROMOTE EVIL AND ALL WICKEDNESS UPON THE EARTH; WHILE TAKING CARE ALWAYS TO PREACH THE REVERSE AND BEHAVING AT ALL TIMES AS IF HE WERE FREE OF THE SLIGHTEST TAIN OF SIN. (657)

This is then diametrically opposed to those things abjected from the ‘pinnacle’ of American society and what the ‘modern’ characters conceive of as good. In opposition to them, God lists papists, Jews, immigrants, African Americans, “HYSTERICAL FEMALES DEMANDING RIGHTS”, atheists and socialists (662), who, it is suggested, subvert the workings of this evil God. The cornerstones of the American Dream – Christianity, Democracy and Freedom – are shown to be already corrupt, and ultimately corrupting when wielded as exclusionary badges of honour instead of inclusionary ideals. Through her representation of the revenants as demon-angels, of God as the Devil and good, civilised citizens as wicked, oppressive sycophants, Oates illustrates the nightmare that the American Dream has become or, indeed, the nightmare that it has always been for some of the United States’ inhabitants.

Although most of the revenants do not directly represent race or call attention to racial injustice, it is the murdered Pearl, and the lynched African Americans, that demand the most attention in Van Dyck’s exhaustive narrative. They are only sporadically mentioned, and Pearl is conflated with the woman who is lynched in Camden when she appears to Todd Slade, but they are made conspicuous by their absence in a novel that takes as its initiating event a conversation about racial injustice. In structural terms, the narrative starts with the lynching at Camden, which coincides with the fifty-year deadline that sparks the Crosswicks Curse, as if Princeton proves anew that it deserves the divine or diabolical punishment wreaked by the ‘avenging angels’. Although the Curse seemingly takes innocent children, it claims more lives from the old, white men and white women who make up the prominent families of Princeton than innocent victims.⁵⁶ Each is consumed by their secret, primal desires and obsessions, and only a very few can be called innocent. The text takes pains to

⁵⁶ The Slade children miraculously come back to life, and are thus not quite lasting victims. The young men murdered by Lieutenant Bayard, Count von Gneist and Amanda FitzRandolph do not receive much context, but can arguably be called the only innocents who fall victim to the effects of the Curse.

reveal their racist, sexist and prejudiced attitudes, and the harm that they do as the ‘masters’ of Princeton. As Professor Van Dyck muses in his ‘Scheme of Clues’, “[i]s the terrible secret of the Curse – that it surrounds us & nourishes us? It is the oxygen that we breathe, all unknowing?” (Oates 400). The Curse is thus directly aimed at those who have benefited most from the oppression and dehumanisation of African Americans, women and the Other. Pearl embodies that Other in several ways. She is of mixed race, disabled, female and poor. As a mill-girl turned prostitute, she is pimped out by white men, and eventually murdered by a white, wealthy seminarian, who comfortably hides in his mansion while a poor man is executed for Pearl’s murder. Her disability – a mangled hand – also recalls the plight of the poor, who were forced to work in dangerous conditions for pittance.⁵⁷ Pearl represents the most downtrodden and Othered of American residents, and the Curse calls attention to the injustices perpetrated against her. Accounts about the unnamed woman who is murdered in Camden are less clear, but the injustice of her death and the call to justice is voiced by characters like Ruggles, who stand apart from the corrupted residents of Princeton.

The nightmare is, then, not only a nightmare for the characters of the novel, but for the author as well, whose parodic use of Gothic fiction and historical fiction conventions expresses a deep disillusionment with the American Dream. This parody is further extended by the narrative situation, as Oates employs a racist and sexist narrator who displays the continuity of bigoted attitudes between the turn of the century and the 1980s. Although M. W. van Dyck II’s sympathy with old Princeton views is generally expressed tacitly, he does at one point lament the “admission of women, ‘blacks,’ and a quota-less quantity of Jews to the great university [...], a trickle of anarchy at first in that low decade, the 1970s, and now a flood” (93), and he often seems sympathetic toward the old, white men of Princeton. The narrator is made an obviously parodic figure, who employs sensationalism, Gothic tropes, minute historical detail and the repetition of the words “the UNSPEAKABLE” in an attempt to outdo his predecessors. However, his often ridiculous remarks and frets render him preposterous, and he becomes dissociated from the reader as he increasingly voices bigoted opinions that echo those of the 1905 Princetonians. The narrator seems preoccupied with a sense of nostalgia for the lost days of white, turn-of-the-century Princeton, and in this way he is also haunted by the past. There is thus a clear schism between the narrator’s focus and the author’s focus. The narrator focuses the narrative on the white, corrupted residents of

⁵⁷ Oates devotes large sections of *The Accursed* to the portrayal of historical socialist Upton Sinclair, who, although represented with the same ironic bite that characterises Oates’s other historical characters, often voices the injustices perpetrated against the American working class. Unfortunately, this falls outside of the scope of this chapter.

Princeton and excludes, to a suspicious extent, the perspectives and views of the oppressed, Othered residents. Even those 'progressive' characters whose perspectives are represented, like Upton Sinclair, Wilhelmina Burr and Josiah Slade, also express their own prejudices and speak from a clearly privileged position. The narrative's focus on the white members of Princeton betrays Van Dyck's own prejudices and interests, and his over-use of the words 'the UNSPEAKABLE' suggests that he is unable to adequately deal with or represent the injustices that his story necessarily evokes. While the repetition draws attention to that which is silenced and marginalised in the novel, the narrator is never able to fully come to terms with it. This unreliable narrative situation instead allows Oates to indirectly draw attention to the revenants, whose hauntologies call the alleged advancement and civilisation of Princeton, as well as white America, into question. Pearl and the woman murdered in Camden thus do not merely haunt Winslow Slade and the residents of Princeton, but the narrative itself.

The continuity established between the 1905 Princeton and the 1980 Princeton is further stretched into the twenty-first century by Oates's decision to finally publish the fifth instalment of her 'Gothic-series' in 2013. As Cologne-Brookes suggests, Oates's fiction often strives to contribute to contemporary cultural debate and addresses various social issues. In *The Accursed* Oates addresses the racism that has characterised American history, continues to mar its development and challenges its claims to being a 'great' civilisation. In an interview with Danel Olson, published in *Weird Tales Magazine*, Oates references the shooting of Trayvon Martin by Police Officer George Zimmerman and the subsequent trial, during which Zimmerman was found not guilty of second-degree murder. The death of Martin and the trial sparked debates about race-relations in the United States, and whether Zimmerman shot Martin because he was black. Oates says, "[t]hough we've come an enormous distance in terms of race, & of feeling sympathy/empathy for people very different from ourselves, the recent Zimmerman trial with its disappointing verdict ... suggests how far we have to go" ("Strange Fruit" 104). *The Accursed*, in its portrayal of an American society haunted by racism that it justifies under an aegis of Christian and Democratic ideology, recalls the same rationalisations, sense of moral superiority and exceptionalism that continues to plague the United States. *The Accursed* thus revises the narrative of racial superiority through its ironic use of a narrator, whose own prejudicial world view is parodied through his often ridiculous concerns with trivial minutiae in the face of true horror, his representation of the revenants and his portrayal of traditional Gothic and historical fiction conventions. The novel's blurring of the lines between wild and civilised, self and Other and good and evil problematise the grand narrative of progress encapsulated in the American Dream. The

narrator's incapacity to adequately represent the horror of past injustices like racism, sexism and slavery suggests that he is still very much haunted by a past that disrupts his sense of ontology and epistemology. The events of *The Accursed* refuse to be narrated with any historiographical certainty, and accordingly the narrative refuses to be subjugated by a narrative of progress. Despite claiming authority over the narrative due to his heritage and academic interests, Van Dyck fails to present a coherent and explanatory account. Instead, *The Accursed* only proves that he is still haunted by the past, and that it affects, or rather infects, both his present and the future. *The Accursed* thus presents a complex and difficult narrative that ultimately portrays revenants who do prove to be the spectral future. The violence that is wreaked upon them and that they wreak in turn suggests that the true evil lies not in demons or angels, or even God, but in the community that oppresses in the name of goodness, freedom and progress.

Conclusion

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by Vanities.

– T.S. Eliot, “Gerontion”

While the notion of human perfection has come under thorough criticism in the twentieth century, with doubts and uncertainties developed through Modernism and Postmodernism, the idea of perfection still holds us enraptured. The value of words like ‘civilised’ and ‘primitive’ has not diminished. They are still applied freely, and with little intellectual discretion, in contemporary conceptualisations of modernity and progress. The grand narrative of progress, clearly, has remained a dominant narrative in human understandings of history and development. This thesis set out to determine how the impetus to exorcise the past is portrayed in contemporary manifestations of Gothic fiction, with the resulting conclusion that this impetus has not, in fact, changed much at all. As demonstrated by the close textual analysis in Chapters 2 to 4, *The Little Stranger*, *The Historian* and *The Accursed* all portray the deep-seated human instinct to exorcise the past for the sake of a ‘better’ future through their ‘modern’ characters’ reactions to the Gothic revenants. However, in the process of delineating Neo-Gothic fiction as distinct from other forms of contemporary Gothic fiction, this thesis has also shown that Neo-Gothic fiction presents an ironised portrayal of the impetus to exorcise that draws attention to its fallibility as well as its futility. Even as Neo-Gothic texts represent their own attempted exorcisms of past injustices, these attempts are already circumscribed by a necessary failure. In this way, Neo-Gothic fiction allows revenants to stand as appeals to justice that draw attention to various instances of historical wrongs. Neo-Gothic fiction therefore performs its own conjuration of the past, but with the intention of highlighting the necessity to pay attention to what its ghosts say, and to suggest that haunting is a necessary state that tempers modernity’s claim to ‘civilisation’, while espousing a more humanitarian approach to understandings of development.

This study has accordingly investigated instances of Neo-Gothic fiction in *The Little Stranger*, *The Historian* and *The Accursed* to determine how this configuration of contemporary Gothic fiction represents history and the impetus to exorcise the past. Derrida suggests that “[o]ne never inherits without coming to terms with [...] some specter, and

therefore with more than one specter. With the fault but also the injunction of *more than one*” (*Specters* 24, his emphasis). This thesis has shown that Neo-Gothic fiction inherits the spectres of its ‘parent’ genres, Gothic and historical fiction. In particular, it has inherited their concerns with history and the grand narrative of progress. It addresses the injunction of “the originary wrong, the birth wound” (*Specters* 24) caused by an imbalanced narrative of history, which focuses on the benefits of abjecting the past to the advantage of the future, but omits the cost of such an abjection, as well as its consequences. Neo-Gothic fiction accordingly addresses this “malediction” (*Specters* 25) by subverting the grand narrative of progress through its mimicking and parodying of the structural make-ups, tropes and conventions of Gothic and historical fiction. Where both original Gothic fiction and traditional historical fiction exhibit the need to re-establish equilibrium in order to promote the advancement of human beings to a more sophisticated, civilised state, Neo-Gothic fiction interrogates the so-called ‘civilisation’ that has resulted from such a view of History.

As illustrated in the chapters, this is primarily achieved through the representation of the revenant and the ‘modern’ characters of the text, whose interaction on the Gothic cusp portray past and present historical fears. Through its manipulation of generic conventions, then, Neo-Gothic fiction illustrates an updated Gothic cusp located in the twentieth century, when historical fears of barbarism clash with a sense of modernity achieved. The hauntology of Neo-Gothic revenants manifests historical injustices through their ‘evil’ Otherness, and thereby reminds the ‘modern’ characters that their so-called modernity is both built upon and perpetuates the same cruelty, oppression and atrocities that should already have been exorcised and safely abjected by ‘modernity’. Neo-Gothic fiction thus shows that the iniquities perpetrated in the name of ‘civilisation’ result in spectres that can and will come back to haunt the present as well as the future.

Today’s Historical Fears and the Twentieth-Century Gothic Cusp

In establishing a significant historical setting and by evoking the conventions of historical fiction, Neo-Gothic fiction creates a continuum between the points in time referenced in the novel and the present of the author. *The Little Stranger*, *The Historian* and *The Accursed* all construct this continuum through overt references to twenty-first-century events or through the portrayal of twenty-first-century attitudes in the texts’ treatment of their ‘modern’ characters. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn suggest that contemporary historical novels

“seek to explore the present’s relationship with the past and the inescapability of the historical in the contemporary” (“Hystorical Fictions” 138). Neo-Gothic fiction seeks this same end, and achieves it through its construction of a historical setting and its manipulation of the narrative situation. In the depiction of characters in previous eras who understand themselves to be the epitome of the ‘modern’, in other words, the most highly evolved humans and the most civilised of the species, Neo-Gothic fiction critiques the notion of ‘modern’ that we might apply to ourselves.

Accordingly, Neo-Gothic fiction highlights particular issues that are still prevalent today, such as racism, classism and sexism. Moreover, Neo-Gothic fiction highlights the violence incurred through historical processes, and the ways in which this violence haunts the present and future. Ostensibly, then, the twenty-first century is the ‘future’ that the historical settings of the novels look forward to, and that – according to Derrida’s description of hauntology as set out in Chapter 1 – the revenants represent as much as the past. This ‘future’ is itself riddled with the injustices to which the revenant draws attention, such as the conflict between the Christian West and the Islamic East referenced in *The Historian*, and the rampant racism in the USA recalled by *The Accursed*. Simon Hay suggests that the “modernity on display in the ghost story has not successfully distinguished itself from its past; indeed, the whole point of the ghost story is that the present *cannot* wrench free of the past and so has not become fully modern” (15). Neo-Gothic fiction reasserts this assessment and applies it more generally by linking the past, present and future through the hauntology of its revenant, whose haunting collapses the distances between these points in time to call attention to the wounds that inhibit development. On a metatextual level, then, the historical fears exhibited by Neo-Gothic fiction revolve around the fear of what it means to progress. Each text exhibits a particular representation of progress that interrogates the notion and its influence over History and history. *The Little Stranger* illustrates the violent and paradoxically regressive methods of progressing, and thereby represents the failure of progress to evolve beyond the barbarism it abjects. *The Historian*, in turn, examines the kinds of progress that have been made by humans, and highlights the fact that History is indeed a narrative of progress, but that that progress can be turned to evil rather than good. While this text does portray the good attempted by ‘modern’ historians, this good is subsumed into a larger and more powerful narrative of the evil achieved through human development. *The Accursed*, finally, interrogates the understanding of progress as an achievement of civilisation by foregrounding the oppression that has resulted from colonial conceptions of progress.

Thereby, *The Accursed* represents a false progress that is itself regressive in its abjection of the humans that the hegemonic 'white' discourse deems primitive and unsuitable.

There then emerges two senses of progress in Neo-Gothic fiction. The first, which is the predominant referent in my use of the word 'progress', is the understanding entailed in the Enlightenment narrative of progress: the Historical movement from primitive to civilised and bad to good in relation to human development, which is usually understood in terms of advances in technology, reason and science. While this understanding does imply greater societal cohesion and a move away from 'barbarism', which is understood in terms of physical violence and primitive attitudes, its focus is on progress for progress's sake. The assumption is made that humanity will evolve as progress happens, and that this will engender goodness in the world through a "realization of reason" (Osborne 37). However, Neo-Gothic fiction illustrates how this narrative of progress as an inevitable movement from bad to good has proven false and incomplete. Moreover, Neo-Gothic fiction suggests that a 'reason'-driven narrative of progress abjects and consequently omits the irrational, violent processes involved in progress. Neo-Gothic fiction instead espouses a more refined understanding of progress that is particularly to do with social reform and 'goodness' as a humanitarian concept. By illustrating the continuation of social issues like racism, sexism, classism and the use of violence, Neo-Gothic fiction attempts to promote progressiveness as opposed to progress for progress's sake. Its revenants present appeals to justice that draw attention to the injustices of the past, not so that the past may be exorcised, but in order for the future to progress in such a way that the progress itself is of a better, more humanitarian quality.

In this sense, Neo-Gothic fiction constructs an overall Gothic cusp that illustrates the struggle between the regressions that plague 'modernity' and the hope of a form of progress that allows for justice to be sought perpetually. In her evaluation of Gothic fiction in the twentieth century, Catherine Spooner suggests that Robert Miles's Gothic cusp has been moved to the nineteenth century through an increasing number of Neo-Victorian texts, which portray the Victorian era as the "newly revealed [...] site of struggle between incipient modernity and an unenlightened past" ("Gothic in the Twentieth Century" 43). However, it is my contention that an important strain of novels is emerging that locates the Gothic cusp in the twentieth century. Despite this century often being described as modern, it has exhibited an unprecedented amount of death and destruction. During the twentieth century, a growing awareness of violence and human rights violations as abominable rather than a matter of course grappled with the overwhelming evidence of escalating atrocities across the world. In

other words, the twentieth century also evinces a greater understanding of atrocities and the fact that they must be fought or countered with greater humanitarianism. The twentieth century accordingly saw remarkable leaps in fighting sexism, racism and classism, and through progressive movements such as these, new understandings of ‘primitive’ and ‘civilised’ were established. Neo-Gothic fiction illustrates the struggles between these new conceptualisations of ‘primitive’ and ‘civilised’, but, crucially, ironises and parodies their construction in order to let the alterity of the revenant – and therefore the appeal to justice – stand. By depicting a futile endeavour to exorcise the past, Neo-Gothic fiction highlights the need to remember and interrogate History in order to move forward and to allow these progressive movements to stay focused on the issues that necessitate them in the first place. In this way, Neo-Gothic fiction, as discussed above, maintains a sceptical, critical approach to History and the narrative of progress, even towards its own notions of progress. In Neo-Gothic fiction’s rendering of History, the processes of the past show that humans are indeed not as evolved as they might hope. In the wake of the destruction, violence, atrocities and terrorism that plague even the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Neo-Gothic fiction begs the question: has the human race progressed to a point where it can think of itself as ‘good’ or, even, really ‘human’? By this I mean, if we are to understand the adjective ‘human’ as expressing the condition of ‘humanity’ or being ‘humane’ – in other words, acting with kindness, benevolence and civility (*OED Online*) – what distinguishes the modern, human characters of Neo-Gothic fiction from the evil revenants that they so desperately attempt to exorcise?

Evil and the Exorcism of the Past

The question of evil is accordingly paramount to Neo-Gothic fiction’s critique of the grand narrative of progress. As discussed in this thesis, the impetus to exorcise the revenants exists because of the hauntologies of the revenants: as disruptive beings who disturb ‘natural’ boundaries between then and now, dead and alive and non-present and present, revenants are construed as categorically evil. Just as Derrida describes the condition of time ‘being out of joint’ as the “very possibility of evil” (*Specters* 34), these revenants are construed by their modern narrators as ontologically evil based on their disruption of teleology, nature and being. This understanding of evil also stems from the unknowability that is engendered by the revenant’s hauntology. As Philip Cole notes, a sense of ‘pure’ or ‘monstrous’ evil entails an inability to explain or comprehend evil (13). However, Neo-Gothic fiction renders their ‘evil’

natures comprehensible to the reader by associating them with the processes of history. Despite their supernatural natures, the revenants of Neo-Gothic fiction are conjured by human actions related to historical processes. *The Little Stranger*'s revenant stems from Faraday's *inheritances*: his class identity. Although Dracula becomes a vampire through some unexplained metaphysical intervention, he is driven by an interest in the evidence of *human evil*, which he discovers in History. The "demon girl" of *The Accursed* as well as the text's assortment of revenants are conjured from a Curse that exacts vengeance for the history of evil perpetrated against Africans in the United States of America. Her murder and her haunting of Princeton and the text itself symbolise the injustices perpetrated under the auspices of a grand narrative that promoted the progress of one race over all others. It is this history of human evil, marked by oppression, atrocity and cruelty, that modernity attempts to abject and exorcise through an explanation based on the grand narrative of progress. Evil accordingly belongs to the primitive and monstrous, while civilisation is rendered as the purview of human endeavour and modern human development.

However, Neo-Gothic fiction resists this grand narrative of progress by situating evil in those who purport to be modern. It is Faraday who violently destroys the Ayreses. Kostova's modern historians, in doing their historiographic work and by contributing to the knowledge of Dracula, ultimately only augment the history of evil. The white, upper class inhabitants of Oates's Princeton become murderous with the slightest temptation, not to mention their well-established racism, sexism and general bigotry. In this sense, Neo-Gothic fiction contrasts the ontologically understood evil of the revenant with the historical evil of human beings. The revenant manifests past evils and injustices, and these are met with modern evils that match or outstrip their historical precedents. This suggests that the grand narrative of progress, which asserts a movement from primitive to civilised, bad to good, is not representative of the history that it purports to illustrate. Instead, despite technological and ideological developments, the human narrative of development is still characterised by evil instead of good. This thesis does not claim that progress is evil, but that it has often been construed as a force that is good in and of itself. The method, type and consequences of progress do not figure into its narrative, which tends to promote progress as the driving force behind history. Neo-Gothic fiction thus does not present a completely hopeless case for humanity. Its textual aim of drawing attention to these historical injustices as well as the injustices that are perpetuated in our 'modern', contemporary times, suggests that they can be addressed and that improvements can be made. The point, however, is that 'moving forward' is only possible when looking back. It is only with the revenant's injunction, its appeal to

justice, that injustices can be addressed and – if not laid to rest – then at least spoken to and of, and allowed to stand as testaments to the true nature of history and History, which will always be subjective and varied.

In using the term ‘Neo-Gothic fiction’, I hoped to establish a distinction in the Gothic fiction genre that delineates contemporary Gothic fiction novels that closely mimic the tropes and conventions of the original Gothic. In doing so, I hope to have established a framework for future investigations of such novels. While the limited scope of this thesis only allowed for the close reading of three texts, there are more to be investigated. From these three texts that display the traits I identify as characteristic of ‘Neo-Gothic fiction’, it can be established that this subgenre evinces a critical approach to history that allows for the interrogation of the metanarratives that inform contemporary understandings of modernity. In offering a theoretical framework based on Derrida’s hauntology and Kristeva’s abjection, this thesis adds to a growing body of literature on Gothic fiction, its theoretical applications and its influences. These findings also enhance an understanding of the representation of history in Gothic fiction, at a time when attention in Gothic studies has moved away from the investigation of how Gothic fiction relates to historical processes. In terms of its configuration of the revenant as a disruptive being whose ontology disturbs boundaries of teleology, nature and the ‘normal’, this thesis has done much to confirm the notion that the past haunts the present. However, where this notion is often only mentioned passingly and usually serves to augment an argument, this thesis has taken it as its central point of investigation. It therefore contributes to Gothic studies a sustained focus on how contemporary Gothic fiction novels represent this haunting of the present through the past in the form of the revenant, its hauntology and the ‘modern’ characters’ attempts at exorcism.

Due to its limited scope, this thesis has not been able to give attention to several interesting areas of investigation. The sample of Neo-Gothic novels can be broadened through further reading of novels that exhibit the traits I have distinguished in this thesis. For example, there are numerous older manifestations of Neo-Gothic fiction that can be analysed in terms of their employment of the revenant and their interrogations of History. While Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* has received a significant amount of attention in terms of its Gothic tropes and its use of historical setting, these factors are usually studied separately. It is my contention that looking at them in combination, and with reference to historical fear and the Gothic cusp, can result in new and interesting insights into Morrison’s textual project in *Beloved*. There are also several other novels that can be investigated as examples of Neo-Gothic fiction, such as Lauren Owen’s *The Quick* (2011), the novels of Susan Hill and John

Harding's *Florence and Giles* (2010). This thesis has also not been able to pay sustained attention to the specific issues raised by Neo-Gothic fiction, and the area of interest can thus benefit from studies that focus on one issue at a time. For instance, the authorship of Neo-Gothic fiction is predominantly female and these texts often express feminist revisionist interests that I could not fully explore. Distinctions of class and notions of nobility also feature prominently in Neo-Gothic fiction. This is evidenced in *The Quick*, for instance, which portrays a group of vampires who attempt to establish an elite by turning the 'cream' of Britain into vampiric overseers of society. Furthermore, there are several instances of Neo-Gothic fiction that particularly interrogate the relationship between race and the grand narrative of progress, and this would provide an important area of study in contemporary Gothic fiction, which is increasingly exhibiting an interest in postcolonial discourses.

Ultimately, what this thesis has provided is an avenue for the investigation of how contemporary Gothic novels attempt to exorcise their own pasts. This thesis has asserted on more than one occasion that Neo-Gothic fiction fails to do so, but this is done deliberately in order to allow history to haunt. Moreover, this inevitable, self-aware failure draws attention to the notion that it is not history or the past or even monsters that need to be exorcised. Neo-Gothic fiction suggests, in the end, that the modern characters of its narratives attempt to exorcise the wrong thing. It expresses the hope that modern humans might attempt to address the issues and injustices that create the wounds from which the revenants are borne, instead of attempting to exorcise the revenant and the past that it represents. In this way, they can fulfil Derrida's hope for the scholar. He suggests that

If he [sic] loves justice at least, the 'scholar' of the future, the 'intellectual' of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself. (*Specters* 221)

The authors of Neo-Gothic fiction prove to be such scholars who give speech to the revenant. Their exorcisms do not focus on destroying or laying to rest that which has been abjected onto our past, but instead conjure narratives that draw attention to the issues and injustices that force the abjection in the first place. In this way, Neo-Gothic fiction allows for the interrogation of history and History, and draws attention to conceptions of the primitive and civilised, the self and the Other. While it does not provide easy answers, Neo-Gothic fiction's revisionist and parodic employment of generic conventions playfully haunts our conceptions of modernity itself and begs further investigation and conversation.

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