

**EXTRAORDINARY POWERS OF PERCEPTION:  
SECOND SIGHT IN VICTORIAN CULTURE, 1830-1910**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.  
Signed by Elsa Catherine Richardson (30, September, 2013)

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### EXTRAORDINARY POWERS OF PERCEPTION: SCOTTISH SECOND SIGHT IN VICTORIAN CULTURE 1840-1910

In the mid-1890s the London based Society for Psychical Research dispatched researchers to the Scottish Highlands and Islands to investigate an extraordinary power of prophecy said to be peculiar to the residents of these remote regions. Described in Gaelic as the *An-da-shealladh* or ‘the two sights’, and given in English as ‘second sight’, the phenomenon was most commonly associated with the vision of future events: the death of neighbour, the arrival of strangers into the community, the success or failure of a fishing trip and so forth. The SPR were not the first to take an interest in this pre-visionary faculty, rather they joined a legion of scientists, travel writers, antiquarians, poets and artists who had made enquires into the topic from the end of the seventeenth century. This thesis examines the remarkably prominent position enjoyed by Scottish second sight in the Victorian popular imagination. In seeking to appreciate why a strange visionary ability was able to make claims upon the attention of the whole nation where other folk motifs were consigned to the realms of specialist interest only, this project charts its migration through a series of nineteenth-century cultural sites: mesmerism and phrenology, modern spiritualism and anthropology, romance literature and folklorism, and finally psychical research and Celtic mysticism. Binding these individual case studies together is a cast of shared actors - Walter Scott, Catherine Crowe, William Howitt, Marie Corelli, Andrew Lang and Ada Goodrich Freer - and a focus on their common investigative and creative cultures. My interest is with how the power of second sight, once defined as a supernatural occurrence tied to the geographically distant and mysterious Scottish Highlands, comes to be transformed by the close of the nineteenth century, into a supra-normal facet of the psyche, potentially accessible and exploitable by all.

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## INTRODUCTION

On August 23 1894, the *Dundee Courier* printed a short report detailing a ‘tour’ being taken through the West Highlands and Islands by several members of a London-based organisation called the ‘Society for Psychical Research’ (SPR). The purpose of their trip, we are told, concerned ‘that peculiar faculty said to be possessed by many people, especially in the Highlands, and popularly known as “second sight”’. Accompanied by a small white terrier dog, ‘two of the lady members’ were making their way through the small fishing villages and farming communities of Tiree, Iona, Eriskay, Barra and Portree, in search of ‘people reputed to have some experience in the matter’.<sup>1</sup> In *Cock Lane and Commonsense* (1894) Andrew Lang, an anthropologist and a prominent member of the SPR, described the hallmarks of this special Scottish vision:

In second sight the percipient beholds events occurring at a distance, sees people whom he never saw with the bodily eye, and who afterwards arrive in his neighbourhood; or foresees events approaching but still remote in time. The chief peculiarity of second sight is, that the visions often, though not always, are of *symbolical* character. A shroud is observed around the living man who is doomed; boding animals, mostly black dogs, vex the seer; funerals are witnessed before they occur, and ‘corpse-candles’ (some sort of light) are watched flitting above the road whereby a burial procession is to take its way<sup>2</sup>

Known in Gaelic as the *An-da-shealladh* or the ‘two sights’, this species of prophetic or superadded seeing was one largely associated with the customs and supernatural lore of the Highlands. It was the alleged topographical, cultural and linguistic specificity of this peculiar visionary faculty that tempted several inquisitive members of the SPR northwards at the close of the nineteenth century.

The Society for Psychical Research was established at Cambridge University in 1882 by a group of eminent scientists and philosophers, and it dedicated itself to the investigation of ‘the large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and Spiritualistic’.<sup>3</sup> Derided by its critics as a society for

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<sup>1</sup> “Second Sight” in the Highlands’, *Dundee Courier & Argus*, 24 August 1894

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (London: Longman & Green, 1894), p. 228

<sup>3</sup> ‘Objects of the Society’, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 1 (1882-3), 3

‘ghost-seers and ghost-seekers’ and hailed by its supporters as the first ‘organised and systematic’ attempt to understand the unexplainable, this remarkable organisation expresses something of the curious intermixture of science and the supernatural so characteristic of the Victorians. Intrigued by strange mesmeric energies, table-turning spirits and apparitions, and fascinated by Eastern philosophy, ancient religions and Christian mysticism, many people in the nineteenth century were dazzled by the draw of transformative hidden wisdom and unseen forces. On an average day in *fin de siècle* London, one might enquire into joining the Theosophical Society or pick up a copy of the journal *Lucifer* to learn of recent developments in esoteric philosophy, attend a meeting of SPR, call up the dead at a spiritualist séance, before rushing home to read the latest supernatural fiction. In their excavation of this world, modern historians have found tools with which to challenge the ‘disenchanted’ reading of modernity made famous by the sociologist and political economist Max Weber. In a lecture given at Munich University in 1917 titled ‘Wissenschaft als Beruf’ or ‘Science as Vocation’, Weber notoriously characterised the age as one of ‘rationalisation and intellectualisation’, and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’, in which the ‘iron cage of reason’ had forced magic, religion and spirituality to retreat ‘from public life’.<sup>4</sup> In this analysis reason triumphed over the imagination, consigning the marvellous, the strange and the Divine to the ‘transcendental realm of mystic life’.<sup>5</sup> For at least the last two decades historians have chipped away at this narrative to reveal the close interdependencies between science and spirituality, capitalism and magic, modernity and wonder.

Historians seeking enchantment have found much to contend with in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The Victorians are tempting to those seeking to understand the interdependence of rational and irrational thought, religion and science, materialism and spiritualism, because they grappled publically and privately with exactly these binaries. Without wishing to adhere too closely to the ‘crisis of faith’ thesis now firmly wedded to an outmoded ‘disenchantment’, it remains the case that the era was

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<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, ‘Science as Vocation’, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* trans. and ed. H.H Gerth and C. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946) pp. 129-156

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Thinking here of Owen Chadwick, *The Secularisation of the Human Mind* (Cambridge: Canto, 1990), Joshua Landy and Michael Saler eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in the Rational Age* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), Christopher H. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T&T International, 2004) and Michael Saler, ‘Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes?: Mass Culture and the Re-enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940’, *The Historical Journal* 45.3 (2003), 599-622

one characterised by its rapidly shifting religious landscape.<sup>7</sup> This was manifest not only in falling church attendance, but also in the different iterations of religious experience or practice that developed in response to an increasingly beleaguered Christian orthodoxy. The SPR arguably constituted an element of this response. In his *Fragments of Prose and Poetry* (1909), Frederic W.H. Myers described how the impetus to found the organisation arose from working through the ‘very flood tide of materialism, agnosticism, —the mechanical theory of the universe, the reduction of all spiritual facts to physiological phenomena’.<sup>8</sup> In answer to this ‘virtual materialism [...] a dull pain borne with joyless doggedness’, Myers helped to pioneer the study of phenomena like automatic writing, spiritualist communication and possession as a means of exploring the uncharted regions of human consciousness and the unrealised potentials of the mind.<sup>9</sup> The founding of the Society reflected a particular attitude toward the supernatural that reached its zenith toward the close of the nineteenth century, which sought to understand and unmask strange phenomena through the application of scientific method. The SPR strove to fashion itself as a viable scientific body: conducting strictly controlled experiments primarily into the possibility of thought transference and the survival of memory in hypnotic states, instituting a system of peer review, and publishing a journal of its findings. Distancing itself from the language of the supernatural, the occult and the ghostly, psychical research staked out new terms of engagement with these phenomena.

The SPR’s fieldwork in Scotland’s remote regions aimed to bring this ‘organised and systematic’ methodology to bear upon the investigation of an established folkloric tradition. With the financial backing of Lord Bute and the practical assistance of a Gaelic-speaking priest, the Society drafted a schedule of questions to be dispatched to sympathetic parties in request of information pertaining to the strange power. Hoping to repeat the success of an earlier study, which saw surveys regarding the prevalence of hallucinatory experiences among the general

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<sup>7</sup> This topic has been readdressed by Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman eds., *Victorian Crisis of Faith: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990)

<sup>8</sup> Frederic Myers, *Fragments of Prose and Poetry*, ed. Eveleen Myers (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1909), p. 33

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

public distributed to over 15,000 people, potential respondents were asked a series of questions regarding occurrences of ‘Second Sight’ in their community<sup>10</sup>:

1. Is ‘Second Sight’ believed in by the people of your neighbourhood?
2. Have you yourself seen or heard of any cases which appear to imply such a gift? If so will you send me the facts?
3. Can you refer me to anyone who has had personal experience, and who would be disposed to make a statement to me on the subject?
4. Do you know of any persons who feel an interest, and would be disposed to help, in this enquiry?<sup>11</sup>

This epistolary plea failed to illicit any significant response from the Highland correspondents, with questionnaires left largely unanswered or returned with only half-remembered stories. Undeterred the Society took the unusual step of dispatching an emissary to carry out work in the field: from early 1894 a ‘lady member’ named Ada Goodrich-Freer undertook, in partnership with a local folklorist, to collect and analyse a corpus of individual testimony pertaining to this peculiar visionary ability. This research formed the basis of several reports delivered to the SPR in London, which were then reproduced in the house journal and published in the spiritualist periodical *Borderland*. Yet despite a promising start and the continuing support of its wealthy benefactor Lord Bute, by the close of 1896 the investigation had been abandoned and its research team disbanded with no coherent account of their findings published.

Why this failed ‘tour’, undertaken by a self-avowed clairvoyant and concerning rumors of supernatural vision in remote fishing villages and depleted crofting communities, should be of any interest to the modern historian is questionable. Certainly, the investigation has attracted very little attention from those otherwise engaged with the early institutional history of the SPR: foundational texts

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<sup>10</sup> On the rise of the questionnaire and the psychological census as the basis for knowledge claims see: Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 75-80

<sup>11</sup> The ‘Census of Hallucinations’ was a large-scale survey intended to bolster the conclusions drawn by Edmund Gurney, Frank Podmore and Frederic Myers in *Phantasms of the Living* (1886). Begun in 1889, it aimed to provide statistical proofs of the hallucinatory model espoused by this earlier study. The Schedule to Circular Letter No IV cited in John L. Campbell and Trevor Hall, *Strange Things: The Story of Fr Allan Macdonald and Goodrich Freer, and the Society for Psychical Research’s Enquiry into Highland Second Sight* [1968] (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), pp. 29-30

like Alan Gauld's *The Founder's of Psychical Research* (1968), Brian Inglis's *Natural and Supernatural* (1978), Renée Haynes's *The Society for Psychical Research 1882-1982* (1982) and Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World* (1985), deal with the subject fleetingly if at all. This marginality is perhaps unsurprising given its absence from contemporary accounts written by the Society's own members: Frank Podmore's *Studies in Psychical Research* (1897) contains no mention of it and William F. Barrett's *Psychical Research* (1911) gives time over to the phenomenon of second sight but again, makes no mention of the SPR's own two-year inquiry into the topic. The only extended treatment of the investigation to date is John L. Campbell and Trevor T. Hall's *Strange Things* (1968). Composed of separate texts, Campbell's *The S.P.R. Enquiry into Second Sight in the Highlands* and Hall's *The Strange Case of Ada Goodrich Freer*, the two find commonality in a shared desire to re-write, what they perceive as, an historical injustice that has seen Goodrich-Freer claim credit for the folkloric work of her Gaelic aid, Father Allan Macdonald. Although this is arguably a laudable aim, in practice it constitutes little more than an ill-spirited and troublingly misogynistic character assassination, more concerned with sensationalising the personal life of woman of considerable 'personal attractions' than with the inquiry itself.<sup>12</sup> The extreme hostility with which these writers approach their subject, which at times verges on the bizarre—as when Hall attributes Goodrich-Freer's remarkable intellectual energy to her family's tenancy toward 'unusual sexual vigor'—tends to deflect from what is actually a significant moment in the history of the institution.<sup>13</sup> The following research has been undertaken on the premise that this unsuccessful inquiry is a historically important one and that something of what makes it interesting is revealed in both the conditions of its failure and by its exclusion from otherwise thorough accounts of the Society's early work.

In her first report to the SPR, Goodrich-Freer remarked of the instances of second sight she had managed to collect, 'the super-normal part of the stories run on line with which we are familiar—premonition often externalized in sight or sound, — thought transference—information subconsciously acquired'.<sup>14</sup> Assured of a common

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<sup>12</sup> This text joins a body of work by Trevor Hall, an ex member of the SPR, devoted to the 'exposing' the misdemeanors of its early researchers. See *The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes* (London: Duckworth, 1962) and *The Strange Case of Edmund Gurney* (London: Duckworth, 1964)

<sup>13</sup> Campbell and Hall, *Strange Things*, p. 107

<sup>14</sup> A frequent contributor to the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* on topics such as crystal gazing and visionary experiences, it was Freer's own avowed 'inner sight' in conjunction with her

conceptual framework, ‘with which we are familiar’, the phenomenon was negotiated here through the epistemologies of late nineteenth-century experimental psychology, or what Shane McCorristine has recently described as the ‘contemporary grid-system of thought-transference and telepathy’.<sup>15</sup> So that though ‘such a faculty is quite unrecognised by the seers themselves, there seems to be little doubt that thought-transference plays an important part in the experiences they relate’: what may resemble ‘prophecies’ to untrained observer must now be recognised as the work of ‘memory and unconscious observation’.<sup>16</sup> The ease with which it appears to have been written into a broader theoretical narrative belies how troublesome the subject of second sight proved to psychical research.

Although the breakdown of the investigation can be attributed to a range of factors, discussed in a later portion of this thesis, one of its primary difficulties lay with the impossibility of making the plots associated with the faculty conform to the standards of evidence pursued by the SPR. Undated and without corroboration from other witnesses, stories collected in the Highlands failed to match veridical conditions set by other studies. A report in *Borderland* recounted a fairly typical story concerning a fishing trip around the Western Isles, during which a member of the party known to ‘possess the gift of second sight’ observed during dinner ‘a young man opposite covered with phosphorescent light’. By this ‘he knew that the young man would soon be drowned’, but his companions assured him that it was highly unlikely, given that the ‘weather was fine’ and they expected to ‘reach the island of Skye’ by morning. Nonetheless that ‘very night’ the doomed man leaned ‘against the railing of the gangway, which could not have been properly fastened, for it gave way: he fell overboard, and his body was never recovered’.<sup>17</sup> Though the tale is certainly not without interest, it fails to match the standards of serviceable scientific data set by institutional psychical research. While Campbell and Hall have characteristically attributed this to a lack of proper attention to method on the part of Goodrich-Freer, it is more profitable to consider how this lack of verifiability might give over a broader account of the disparities between the SPR’s ‘contemporary grid system’ and the folklore of the Scottish Highlands.

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declared Scottish heritage, which convinced Sidgwick and Myers to commission her for the second sight project.

<sup>15</sup> Shane McCorristine. *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 106

<sup>16</sup> ‘Second Sight in the Highlands’, *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index* 3 (January 1896) 57-61 (59)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 60

This problematic rested primarily on the question of testimony, who did and who did not fit the profile of a reliable observer capable of accurately accounting for their own experiences. Psychical research communicated its findings to a late-Victorian audience through the publication of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*; a journal composed of not only experimental case studies and philosophical essays, but also by the individual case studies submitted by readers. As Roger Luckhurst has attended to, this epistolary data was shaped by exclusionary practices aimed at procuring information from right type of correspondent, so that class came to inform ‘both the content and threshold for inclusion’.<sup>18</sup> Though the SPR initially replicated this model by circulating a questionnaire among ‘Sheriffs’, ‘leading Schoolmasters’, the ‘clergy’, ‘doctors’ and ‘Police’, the resounding failure of this strategy necessitated a significant broadening of its remit. Confirming the fear voiced by Frederic Myers that ‘the second sight evidence may be found too largely amongst *fishermen* and other uneducated persons’, the Highland investigation necessitated contact with witnesses at significant remove from their preferred middle-class observer.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, after having deemed it essential to conduct interviews with ‘uneducated persons’, those assigned to the task encountered a people either unwilling to speak openly about the ‘seers’ in their community or likely to regale their listener with stories better suited to the *Folk Lore Record*.<sup>20</sup> To extract from a people, Goodrich-Freer complained, ‘apparently destitute of a sense of time, and having few events from which to date occurrences, dates more exact than ‘thereafter’ or ‘heretofore’ is a labour demanding all possible tact and patience’.<sup>21</sup>

The evidence associated with second sight was thus problematic in several respects, being not only sourced from witnesses not usually deemed as trustworthy, but also embedded within a culture to which English-speaking members of SPR found themselves largely excluded. As the Lowland-born Andrew Lang commented, ‘Though second sight is so rooted in Celtic opinion, the tourist or angler who ‘has no Gaelic’ is not likely to hear much about it’.<sup>22</sup> Behind these procedural difficulties, however, lay a greater a problem: second sight might be ‘now *called* telepathy’, Lang cautioned his reader, but this denomination did not ‘essentially advance our

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<sup>18</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 150

<sup>19</sup> Peter Dewar to Lord Bute February 1893, quoted in *Strange Things*, p. 30

<sup>20</sup> Frederic Myers cited in *Strange Things*, p. 26

<sup>21</sup> *Journal of Psychical Research* 7 (January 1896), 184

<sup>22</sup> *Cock Lane and Commonsense*, p. 247

knowledge of the subject', because the faculty connotes 'a belief and system' that preceded and exceeded the boundaries of this categorisation.<sup>23</sup> Bound to the fairy lore of rural communities and freighted with accrued historical and cultural meanings, the strange faculty referred to by Lang maintained a disruptive narrative particularity that refused to meet the epistemological demands made by psychical research. Offering more than a collection of isolated, apparently supernatural, occurrences, Scottish second sight presented instead an intricately systemised, phenomenologically consistent, vision of individual subjectivity and its relation to the wider universe

These logistical, hermeneutical and methodological difficulties beg an obvious question: namely, why were the SPR interested in an obscure piece of Highland folklore in the first place? After all in establishing the criteria of a reliable witness—literate, of a certain class and English speaking—the Society also prescribed the tone and content of 'veridical' experience. In place of tales of witchcraft, fairies or ghosts, the scientifically orientated language of psychical research concerned 'phantasms', 'crisis hallucinations', 'sensory automatisms' and 'hypermnesic dreams'. Given this quite conscious attempt to distance their practice, along class and language lines, from superstitions, fairytales and supernatural lore, the decision to give serious consideration to a phenomena associated precisely with these categories seems somewhat disingenuous.<sup>24</sup> Such a disconnect might go some way to explaining the marginal position of the topic in histories of the SPR: the investigation of second sight seems out of place, a botched experiment in fieldwork and awkward foray into the tales of the uneducated. Yet its failure and subsequent marginality does not bring us any closer to understanding why the inquiry was initiated in the first place. The answer posited here is at once pleasingly simple and potentially complex: the SPR were incited to launch an investigation into the strange premonitory gifts of the Highlander, because the second sight tradition retained a remarkably prominent position in the Victorian imagination. In seeking to appreciate why this might be, why a strange visionary ability was able to make claims on the attention of the whole nation where other folk motifs were consigned to the realms of specialist interest, this thesis charts the migration of second sight through a series of nineteenth-century cultural sites: mesmerism and phrenology, spiritualism and anthropology, romance

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691) with comment by Andrew Lang and an introduction by R.B. Cunninghame Graham (Eneas MacKay: Stirling, 1893), p. 55

<sup>24</sup> Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 9



literature and folklorism, psychical research and Celtic mysticism. Binding these individual case studies together is a cast of shared actors and a common focus on the investigative cultures operating in a particular historical moment. As with the SPR's aborted inquiry, attention will be paid to the ways in which the 'visionary' might be said to both collude and subvert the rationalising gestures of the nineteenth century's observational regimes.

This is not to imply that narratives of second sight constituted a body of unsullied or pure knowledge, distorted by the varied agendas of Victorian observers. Rather, as will be attended to in Chapter One, what constituted the second-sight 'tradition' was largely the invention of late seventeenth and eighteenth-century antiquarians, scientists, travel writers and artists. Here it is necessary to clarify my own position in relation to the topic, which in several important ways mirrors the exteriority negotiated by research bodies like the SPR. Raised in large town in Scotland's central belt, my relation to the Highlands has been that of a thoroughly Anglicised tourist who, like Andrew Lang's inquisitive angler, 'has no Gaelic'. With this linguistic and cultural ignorance in mind, it should be made plain that I intend to say very little about the historical experience or national identity of the Highlands. In turn, though stories of second sight may well have composed an essential feature of everyday life in these remote regions and the phenomenon almost certainly possessed a history that precedes the English naming of it, these histories lie far outside the scope of this thesis. Rather, attention will be paid only to the image of the Highlands as refracted through the eyes of Lowland Scottish and English observers. Read as one of Eric Hobsbawm's 'invented tradition[s]', as 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past', second sight emerges as part of a broader narrative concerned with the problematic relation between the study of 'folk' customs and the politics of representation.<sup>25</sup>

In one of the few recent treatments of the topic, A.J.L. Busst, having convincingly argued for the interconnections between Romantic visionary aesthetics,

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<sup>25</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introducing: Inventing Traditions', *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.1-16 (2). Of particular relevance is Hugh Trevor Roper's essay for this collection, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', pp. 15-42

German *naturphilosophie* and the ‘myth’ of second sight in the late eighteenth century, concludes that, “The reason for the decline of the myth is that what in fact primarily supported the plausibility of Scottish second sight was also what above all aroused interest in its occurrence outside of Scotland: its resemblance to other phenomena”.<sup>26</sup> For Busst, the popularisation of animal magnetism and attendant phenomena like clairvoyance and somnambulism meant that by the early decades of the nineteenth century this geographically peculiar power had disappeared into a broader disciplinary formation. Though this comes close to my own perspective, being similarly concerned with how this folkloric motif was constructed at a point of contact with larger scientific or literary trends, we diverge on the issue of its purported ‘decline’.

In the first instance, this easy dismissal is complicated by the significant number of texts published throughout the nineteenth century specifically on the topic of second sight, from Mac Darvus’s *Letters on the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions: Real Ghosts and Second Sight* (1847) and J.C. Campbell’s *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1851), to Laura G. Fixen’s *Mind Reading, or, Second Sight* (1902) and William Morrison’s *Highland Second Sight* (1909), and the continued circulation of pre-Victorian studies like John Frazer’s *Deuteroscopia (Second Knowledge); Or a Brief Discourse Concerning Second Sight* (1763) and Theophilus Insulanus’s *Treaties on Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (1763). The etymological and conceptual survival of this memorat, despite its being called upon to contribute to a range of other discourses, must be partly attributable to its adaptability, but it also suggests its survival as a subject in its own right. Against the assimilation thesis pursued by Busst, this research is undertaken on the presumption that there is something specific to the second-sight tradition that made it a recurrent topic of interest for curious Victorians.

## 1. SCHOLARLY CONTEXTS

The Victorian *supernatural* has recently been described as having a ‘protean quality of being a cause, a place, a kind of being, a realm, a possibility, a new form of nature and a hope for the future’: an amorphous multiplicity that has long attracted critical

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<sup>26</sup> A.J.L. Busst, ‘Scottish Second Sight: The Rise and Fall of a European Myth’, *European Romantic Review* 5.2 (1995), 149-175 (167-168)

intervention from those working in the humanities.<sup>27</sup> The last fifteen years have, however, witnessed a shift in the focus of this attention away from literary treatments of the ghost story or social histories of superstition, towards the interdisciplinary study of spiritualism, mesmerism, mysticism and the occult. Scholars such as Jill Galvan, Christine Ferguson, Roger Luckhurst, Shane McCorristine, Pamela Thurschwell and Sarah Wilburn have explored the complex patterns of information sharing that took place between heterodox practices, psychology and literature.<sup>28</sup> In doing so they have not only revived previously neglected areas of nineteenth-century experience, but also unearthed important metaphoric interstices capable of upending any easy division of natural and supernatural, science and religion, rational and irrational. From a slightly different angle, Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983) and Jenny Bourne Taylor's *In the Secret Theatre of the Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (1998), have similarly pressed the interconnectivity of scientific and fictional narrative, finding commonalities that extend far beyond thematic concerns to the intricacies and structures of language itself. Methodological and disciplinary differences aside, these treatments share an understanding of Victorian fiction that emphasises it as a contributor and active participant in the formation of scientific knowledge, rather than a reflexive vehicle for its dissemination.<sup>29</sup> This thesis is similarly invested in the possibilities of an interdisciplinary approach to nineteenth-century history and occupies territories alike to those covered in these studies.

However, the following research also distinguishes itself in several respects: points of divergence that reflect not only upon my own scholarly allegiances, but also on the nature the subject. Though it retreads some ground familiar to Victorian studies, it does so with the intention of exploring a previously unacknowledged constellation of affinities and inter-dependencies. In tracking the movement of a

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<sup>27</sup> Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, 'Introduction' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds. Bown, Burdett, Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 1-19 (8)

<sup>28</sup> Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communications Technologies, 1859-1919* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), Christine Ferguson, *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: The Brutal Tongue* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006), Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghost and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Sarah Wilburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006)

<sup>29</sup> See especially Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1999) and George Levine *Realism, Ethics and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

specific folkloric motif from the Highlands of Scotland, through Lowland and English cultural sites this thesis necessarily engages with questions of nationhood in relation to those posed by supernatural phenomena. Recent histories of Scottish literature and culture after the 1707 Acts of Union, have proposed post-colonial theory as an appropriate lens to begin such a reading.<sup>30</sup> While conceiving of Scotland as marginalised or dominated is complicated by that society's oscillation between the subject positions of coloniser and colonised, studies such as Matthew Wickman's *The Ruins of Experience* (2007), Saree Makdisi's *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (1998) and Silke Stroh's *Uneasy Subjects: Postcolonialism and Scottish Gaelic Poetry* (2011) claim post-colonialism as the appropriate critical frame in which to consider the place of Gaelic populations within a newly unified Great Britain. Where the Lowlands became apprentice to England's imperial ambitions, territories beyond the Highland Line remained, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, linguistically, politically, and religiously 'other'.<sup>31</sup> Building upon these readings of the 'Celtic fringe' as a kind of proving ground for colonial discourse, this thesis seeks to understand what cultural motivations might be said to have underpinned the designation of second sight as a peculiarly Celtic faculty.

By acknowledging the customs and lore of the Highlands as contributors to discourses inculcated at the fringes of the metropole—spiritualism, mesmerism, psychical research—this thesis seeks to explore a relatively uncharted area of nineteenth-century thought: namely, the problematic negotiation of oral culture and supernatural lore with the rationalising and universalising gestures of new investigative cultures. Discussing the work of the SPR, Owen Davis has proposed that it can 'tell us little about the experiences, beliefs and legends of the rural and urban working class, in other words the majority of the population'; while a recent introduction *The Victorian Supernatural* (2004) reflects upon modern spiritualism's need to distinguish itself from the "superstition' of the uneducated and ignorant, whose belief in supernatural beings and events was untouched by the rationalism of

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<sup>30</sup> See also Mark Toogood 'Decolonizing Highland Conservation' in *Decolonizing Nature*, eds. William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2003), Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998) and Michael Hecter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997)

<sup>31</sup> 'The Highland Line' refers to a geographical boundary fault running from Helensburgh in the south-west to Stonehaven in the north-east. More pressing for the purposes of this thesis are the ways in which this topographical feature also serves as a metaphor for cultural, political, religious and linguistic divisions

educated opinion'.<sup>32</sup> Justifying the supernatural as an element of nature's unknown laws necessitated, according to these accounts, the jettisoning of myths and customs that spoke too clearly of the illiterate, the poor and the credulous. Part of the work of this study will involve positing an alternative narrative, one that considers fairy tales and folk legends as capable of both troubling and affirming these scientising discourses. Borrowing the term *folk metaphysics* or 'folkloric assumptions about how the supernatural engages with the natural world' from Jason Marc Harris's monograph on the literary fantastic, my concern is with how the type of experience facilitated by second sight—animistic, magical, irrational—presses us to re-consider well-worn critical tropes regarding the empiricist monomania of the Victorian supernatural.<sup>33</sup> Respecting Julia Briggs's description of the ghost story as a 'combination of modern scepticism with a nostalgia for an older, more supernatural system of beliefs', this thesis posits second sight as a tradition forged at a similar intersection.<sup>34</sup>

In *Ghost-Seers, Detectives and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (2010), Srdjan Smajic asserts that 'ghost stories are narratives about people who cannot *see* otherwise than with their bodily eyes, and who invoke science more often than religion when they see something unexpected'.<sup>35</sup> Although this research does not devote itself primarily to literary examples, it is invested in the ways in which second sight—as a form of popularised inner vision—might complicate this blanket dismissal of non-corporeal sight. The prophetic tales of the Highland seer retained the interest of nineteenth-century scientists, anthropologists, psychologists and writers because they spoke to two of the abiding intellectual occupations of their age: history and human vision. The value of historicizing vision and in particular, what composes visual 'reality', has been adeptly illustrated by Norman Bryson, who argues that:

For human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed descriptions of an intelligible world. Vision is socialized, and therefore

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<sup>32</sup>Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts*, p. 9 and Bown, Burdett, and Thurschwell, 'Introduction' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, p. 8

<sup>33</sup> Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2008), p. viii

<sup>34</sup> Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber, 1977), p. 19

<sup>35</sup> Srdjan Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 47 (my italics)

deviation from this social construction of visual reality can be measured and named, variously, as hallucination, misrecognition, or ‘visual disturbance’<sup>36</sup>

As studies like Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1990), Kate Flint’s *Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (2000) and Daniel A. Novak’s *Realism, Photography and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2008) suggest, the importance of the eye and the variant channels of inquiry its theorisation opens up, has already proved a particularly rich area of research for Victorian scholars. Informed by these critical interventions, this treatment distinguishes itself in both approach and topic: where previous work has interrogated the impact of new technologies like the camera and the stereoscope on the visual imagination, or queried the role of sight in popular genres of fiction, my research is concerned with un-embodied vision and more specifically, with precognitive or retro-cognitive experience. It is at this point, I contend, that the question of seeing intersected with questions of temporality and history making: the second-sighted vision was not only an object of history it is also a participant in the historiographical process. The prediction of a seer, whether reproduced by oral or textual formations, was itself a form of historical narrative, which refused linear formations of time to conflate the present with the future, so that the effect was ascertained before its cause comes into existence. Attending to the definition of ‘prophecy’ given by Edwin Ardener as a ‘condition of both individuals and of structures’ which ‘links language, time and space’, the second-sighted vision negotiates similar co-ordinates.<sup>37</sup>

At stake in this discussion are issues of creativity, narrative and inspiration. Relevant here is Linda Hutcheon’s assertion that the nineteenth century ‘gave birth to both the realist novel and history, two genres which show a desire to select, construct, and render self-sufficient and closed a narrative world that would be representational but still separate from changing experience and historical process.’<sup>38</sup> This historical turn was felt across the life sciences, literature and theology, and it sought to confer the past with new authority over the present by tasking it with

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<sup>36</sup> Norman Bryson, ‘The Gaze of the Expanded Field’, in Hal Foster ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1998), p.91

<sup>37</sup> Edwin Ardener ‘The Voice of Prophecy’ in *Edwin Ardener: The Voice of Prophecy and Other Essays*, ed. Malcolm Chapman, (Oxford and New York, Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 134-154 (135)

<sup>38</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 478

maintenance of cultural stability.<sup>39</sup> Second sight performed a contradictory role in relation to the production of organic accounts of historical development. On the one hand, as has been picked up upon in post-colonial readings, the Highlands were repeatedly called upon to signify a kind of pre-literate or ‘primitive’ culture, distinct from the civilised world occupied by the historian. Depending on the nature of their ideological investment, the observer might find in Britain’s wild north the comforting survival of a traditional way of life removed from the de-stabilising forces of industrialisation, or alternatively they might unearth an equally affirming reminder of the reprehensibly ‘savage’ state from which modern society had evolved. From either perspective, the Highlands reified a teleological understanding of historical order, serving as a spatially situated and linearly traced theatricalisation of the nation’s past. In one sense, then, this project is concerned with the kinds of work to which a particular piece of folklore is put by a range of historicising discourses: phrenology, evolutionary anthropology, folklorism and the romance novel.

Complicating this are the functions that the second-sighted narrative itself may be said to have performed in Victorian culture and more widely, how *other* ways of seeing—prophetic, pre-visionary, inner, extra sensory—might interrupt, puncture or shadow the authority of these new historical sciences. Following Hayden White’s description of the work of the historian as a ‘poetic process’ a ‘fusing of events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the *object* of representation’, this thesis is concerned with the narrative structures created by extraordinary foreknowledge.<sup>40</sup> The premonitions associated with second sight usually attended to events to be enacted within the seer’s community. Distinct from the doctrinal revelations of the religious prophet or the nation forming proclamations of the mystic oracle, the Highlander’s visions typically gave over a micro history of their neighbourhood: the death of a neighbour, the unexpected homecoming of a loved one or the arrival of strangers into town and so on. Respecting Diana Basham’s useful description of prophecy as constituting ‘a threat and a challenge to existing laws and paradigms of reality’ because it ‘indicates weakness in the existing law’ by forcing ‘that law to consider what has been pushed outside’, my interest lies with

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<sup>39</sup> See for example, J.W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (1981), Dwight Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History* (1985) and David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture* (1997)

<sup>40</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 125 (my italics) Also relevant here is Rhodri Hayward’s *Resisting History: Religious Transcendence and the Invention of the Unconscious* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)

how the seemingly mundane predictions associated with the ‘two sights’ embodied ontologically disruptive potentials.<sup>41</sup>

In parallel with Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen’s contention that, ‘Mental illness, however real it may be, does not exist apart from the various discourses and practices that *make* it exist’, second sight must be recognised as a discursive construct, produced to serve the epistemological needs of a number of scholarly and scientific disciplines.<sup>42</sup> Peaks of interest in the mundane prophecies of the Highlander were largely contingent upon the perceived need to demarcate institutional boundaries or stake out new knowledge terrains. Whether placed in defence of the miraculous against the encroachment of religious skepticism, collected as evidence of the folly of superstition in an enlightened age or mourned as the flickering embers of a dying culture, the study of second sight tended to reveal more of the observer than the subject. A good deal of the material covered by this research concerns the application of scientific or historicist methodologies to seemingly miraculous or supernatural events. Written into a vast literature, produced throughout the nineteenth century, the fabled power of second sight joined famous hauntings, witchcraft trials and ghostly possessions in composing a comprehensive history of the supernatural. Published with varied intentions, from debunking to defending the existence of forces beyond the empirical, these texts revealed a broad spectrum of Victorians willing to engage with the questions raised by the seemingly supernatural. Less evident, but equally important, are the ways in which extra-sensory vision and pre-visionary temporalities informed scientific epistemology itself. Building on the suggestion made by Peter Pels that the ‘super vision’ pursued by nineteenth-century science mimics the extraordinary feats of ocular perception associated with ‘occult’ seeing, this reading recognises the border between the supernatural and the rational as a highly porous one.<sup>43</sup>

In her essay ‘Forging the Missing Link: Interdisciplinary Stories’, Gillian Beer situates the value of interdisciplinary methodology with its potential to tract the

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<sup>41</sup>Diana Basham, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: MacMillan, 1992), p. 51

<sup>42</sup>Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Making Minds and Madness: From Hysteria to Depression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 5

<sup>43</sup> See Peter Pels, ‘Alfred Wallace, Edward Tylor, and the Visual Politics of Fact’ in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* eds., Peter Pels and Birgit Meyer (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 241-271 and Peter Pels, ‘Occult Truths: Race, Conjecture, and Theosophy in Victorian Anthropology’, in *Excluded Ancestors, Inevitable Traditions: Essays Towards a More Inclusive History of Anthropology* ed. Richard Handler (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000) pp. 11-41



‘circulation of intact ideas across a larger community’, while at the same time bring into ‘question the methods and materials of differing intellectual practices’ and in doing so ‘uncover problems disguised by the scope of established disciplines’.<sup>44</sup> This study is similarly invested in the stories that emerge from this method: when anthropology is forced into conversation with spiritualism, or psychology is made to reflect upon the romance novel, the epistemologies of these disciplines reveal themselves in a state of flux, out of which new connections and possibilities arise. Stretching Beer’s argument to its limits, this thesis posits second sight as a ‘intact idea’ distributed across a series of nineteenth-century investigative cultures: mesmerism, phrenology, spiritualism, anthropology and psychical research. In doing so I intend to characterise the second-sight tradition as embodying the same disruptive potentials that Beer identifies as a condition of interdisciplinary methodologies. In that, in their movement through these observational regimes the prophetic tales of the Scottish Highlander were empowered to reveal fault lines and interconnectivities.

## 2. CHAPTER OUTLINE

This thesis will chase the figure of the Highland seer through the multiplex popular, literary and scientific cultures of the nineteenth century. As such it covers a broad timescale and engages with a hugely varied set of sources, from supernatural histories and spiritualist polemics, evolutionary treatises and experimental psychical research, to romance novels and folklore studies. These differently weighted and tonally divergent documents are brought into coherence by the pursuit of a very specific set of key terms: ‘second sight’, ‘Highland’, ‘pre-vision’ and ‘prophecy’. The first chapter, ‘Second Sight and the Creation of the Highlands, 1660-1830’, provides a necessary overview of the pre-Victorian history of second sight, beginning with the enquiries made by the Royal Society chemist Robert Boyle in the late seventeenth century and closing with the publication of Walter Scott’s debunking of the supernatural in *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830). While my interest lies primarily with reading this pre-visionary narrative within the specifics afforded by a nineteenth-century context, it is necessary to give over a sense of the philosophical and literary trends, and evolving scientific and cultural institutions implicated in the formation this tradition.

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<sup>44</sup> Gillian Beer, ‘Forging the Missing Link: Interdisciplinary Stories’ in *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 115-145 (115)

It is during the period covered by this chapter that a canon of writing on the topic of second sight was first established, whose texts and guiding tenets formed the basis of future investigations. Retold and re-published through the nineteenth century, works like John Frazer's *Deuteroscopia (Second Knowledge); Or a Brief Discourse Concerning Second Sight* (1763), James Macpherson's *Treaties on Second Sight* (1761) and Theophilus Insulanus's *Treaties on Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (1763) provided the foundation for studies undertaken over a century later. In a long chapter on second sight in *The Making of Religion* (1896), for example, Andrew Lang draws upon the work of a relatively small group of authors, including Robert Boyle and Joseph Glanvill, to provide examples of the faculty at work and to argue for its recurrence through history.<sup>45</sup> Such connections are made not with the intention of demonstrating a lack of originality on the part of Victorian commentators, but rather with the aim of realising the history of second sight as dependent upon complex patterns of influence and textual circulation.

Chapter Two, 'Clear Seeing and Spirit Bodies: Catherine Crowe and Mesmerism, 1830-1860', moves the discussion forward to a mid-nineteenth-century context and charts the migration of second sight through the heterodox sciences of craniometry, phrenology and mesmerism. Reading this as a period in which the sciences worked to solidify a disciple-orientated structure based upon increasing specialisation, this chapter attends to the ways in which this project was one undertaken in conflict with the competing claims of various forms of 'contested' knowledge. Prominent in this history are developing discourses around the theory and practice of animal magnetism, its promise of boundless therapeutic possibilities and the new language of the mind it helped to institute. The popularisation of this practice transformed the tradition of second sight, transacting a phenomenon once associated with the folklore of a geographically and culturally distant people, to middle-class parlors, theatres, lecture halls and medical schools across the country. This wide dissemination of a Highland 'superstition', however, presented Lowland intellectuals engaged with processes of rapid industrialisation and wedded to rationalist cosmologies with a problematic representational negotiation. With this in mind, this chapter conducts a reading of second sight from within one of Edinburgh's intellectual and scientific communities, namely the group of Whig reformers that gathered around the phrenologist George Combe. More specifically

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* [1898] (Fairfield, IA: 1<sup>st</sup> World Library, 2007 pp. 41-46

my interest here is with Catherine Crowe, the novelist and disciple of Combe, made famous by a best-selling defence of the supernatural, *The Night Side of Nature, or Ghosts and Ghost-Seers* (1848). Occupying a prominent role in Edinburgh literary life and partaking in a wide range of intellectual pursuits, Crowe's biography opens up unrecognised connections between individuals and subject areas, while her calls for the 'scientific' treatment of phenomena like second sight engaged in contemporary debates concerning the reliability of ocular perception and the possibilities of inner vision.

Chapter Three, 'Primitive Spiritualism: Second Sight and Origin Myths, 1860-1880', charts 'the golden age of spiritualism' alongside the institutional and popular beginnings of modern anthropology, an intellectual tradition that transformed tales of exotic tribes and customs, superstitions, ghosts and myth into schematic visions of human development.<sup>46</sup> Reading these seemingly distinct discourses as habitually dependant upon one another, this chapter is concerned with how the metaphoric expansiveness of evolutionism gave over an account of social development that plotted the world's cultures and their peoples, past and present, along a scale from primitive to civilised. Largely homologous with imperial ideologies, accounts given by early anthropological thinkers usually identified Britain or Western Europe as having attained a higher degree of refinement than was typically evinced amongst the races over which they ruled. Here I consider how the second sight tradition is pressed, by evolutionist thinking in various forms, as a type of inheritance: whether written into the biographies of famous mediums, as an example of where civilisation has progressed from or alternatively might journey to, or as a part of a living archaeology uncovered in the remote regions of Britain and the Empire. Key to this history are the figures of Edward Burnett Tylor the founder of comparative anthropology and a vocal opponent of spiritualism, and William Howitt, a Quaker reformer and early convert to the new religion. For thinkers like Tylor, spiritualist belief, second sight and other 'superstitions' constituted a form of primitivism that located the credulous both temporally and geographically elsewhere to the privileged space occupied by their home nation. Yet the close articulation between spiritualist and anthropological principles, evinced in the evolutionary model of post-death evolution pursued by

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<sup>46</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 70

some spiritualists and in the quasi-anthropological histories produced by writers like Howitt, suggests a more complex picture.

Picking up upon the anthropological themes and popular evolutionism discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter Four: 'Psychical Research, Folklore and Romance, 1880-1910' reads the second sight tradition through the prism of the late-nineteenth-century romance revival in British fiction. Centered on the seemingly antagonistic figures of the Scottish polymath and spokesman for the 'masculine' adventure novel Andrew Lang, and the moral crusader and best-selling novelist Marie Corelli, this chapter explores second sight as *subject* for and *producer* of the popular romance. This will involve attending more closely, on the one hand, to the narrative components and generic framing of pre-visionary narratives—as folklore, personal anecdote, fiction and so on—and on the other, to the cadence of non-embodied or prophetic vision as a form or analogue of creative inspiration. While Lang's extensive writing on the topic of second sight, through comparative anthropology, folklore, Scottish and literary histories, permits us to chart its progress through multiple sites of enquiry, the attention paid by Corelli, in her fictional and critical writings, to questions of artistic inspiration offer an opportunity to extend the lineage, explored in previous chapters, between the premonitory powers of the Highlander and models of creative inspiration. Respecting the suggestion made by Robert Louis Stevenson in his 1884 essay, 'A Humble Remonstrance', that the fantastic in literature 'appeals to certain sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man', attention is paid here to the relationship between questions of literary form or production and evolving psychological understandings of the imagination.<sup>47</sup>

The final chapter, 'Research in the Field: Ada Goodrich Freer and Fiona Macleod, 1890-1910', returns this study to where it begun, with the Society for Psychical Research's investigation into second sight in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Where the only other treatment of this topic to date, John L. Campbell and Trevor T. Hall's *Strange Things* (1968), reads its chief researcher Ada Goodrich-Freer as an unreliable witness on the grounds that she appears not to have always told the 'truth' about her personal history, my interest lies with exactly this process of self-construction. Namely, how in her pursuit of the illusive Highland seer Goodrich-Freer attempted to fashion herself in that image by laying claim to 'Celtic' blood,

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', *Longman's Magazine* 5 (1884), 139-47

advertising her own clairvoyant skills and vastly overstating her grasp of the Gaelic language. Finding a corollary for this desire for identification and proximity in the contemporaneous Celtic Revival, this chapter reads the SPR's failed inquiry alongside the re-discovery of Scottish folk culture and mysticism being undertaken by this broader cultural movement. More specifically, time is given to William Sharp, a Scottish born lawyer and published poet, who also wrote poetry and instructional prose under a female pseudonym 'Fiona Macleod'. Fashioned as a Celtic wise woman, removed from society and living in the remote Highlands, Macleod penned texts such as *Mountain Lovers* (1895), *The Sin-Eater and Other Tales* (1895) and *The Divine Adventure* (1900) and corresponded with William Butler Yeats on Celtic mysticism. Importantly, the adoption of this pseudonym was prompted by Sharp's membership to the Order of the Golden Dawn, an elite magical society that provided adepts with training in the practices of tarot divination, astrology, geomancy, scrying and astral travel. Within this society, and particularly in the proposed 'Order of Celtic Mysteries', folklore was subject to a reading that emphasised both the reality and reproducibility of its preternatural structures, so that accounts of second sight become not only evidence of unique psychical abilities, but instructive guides to the cultivation of visionary techniques. This chapter seeks to chart a movement from passive ability toward occult technique, understood in relation to the narratives offered by psychical research and the wider meanings attached to an imagined 'Celtic' history and culture.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SECOND SIGHT AND THE CREATION OF THE HIGHLANDS, 1660-1830

Contemplating the ‘years 1660 to 1850, or so’, Andrew Lang, writing in 1897, condemned ‘the cock-sure common sense’ of the age, which ‘regarded everyone who had an experience of hallucination as a dupe, a lunatic or a liar’, as having severely retarded the serious scientific consideration the supernatural now being undertaken in earnest by the Society for Psychical Research.<sup>1</sup> While the author seems uncertain of where to end this long period of destructive scepticism, ‘1850, or so’, he has no doubt as to where it began, in 1660—the year that the Royal Society of London was founded.<sup>2</sup> Instituted by Royal Charter and counting the architect Christopher Wren, the economist William Petty and the chemist Robert Boyle among its original members, this new scientific institution existed to, in a broad sense, promote the investigation of nature through observation and experiment. As John Hedley-Brooks notes, its formation marked the beginning of an era in which the ‘scientific world established itself with more than seventy official scientific societies (and almost as many private ones) in urban centres as far removed as St. Petersburg and Philadelphia’.<sup>3</sup> For Lang, engaged at the end of the nineteenth century in attempting to procure ‘first hand’ evidence of ghosts, poltergeists, premonitions, death wraiths from witnesses who insisted their experience was ‘only a dream’ for fear of appearing mentally unhinged, 1660 marks the beginning of a new and ultimately disastrous approach to strange phenomena. As Keith Thomas has argued, by the beginning of the eighteenth century religious and scientific cultures agreed that the supernatural no longer had a place in civilised society and ‘although men went on seeing ghosts after

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lang, *The Book of Dreams and Ghosts* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897), p. ix

<sup>2</sup> Officially instituted by Royal Charter in 1660, The Royal Society of London originally composed a group of around twelve scientists, among them Christopher Wren, William Petty and Robert Boyle, known only as the ‘Invisible College’. Surviving in various forms through one of the most troubled periods in English history, which took in the Civil War, the execution of Charles I, the exile of his son and the Protectorate, this group eventually split, becoming The Philosophical Society of Oxford and the Royal Society, though strong professional and personal links between the two were maintained. Michael Hunter’s *The Royal Society and its Fellows: the Morphology of an Early Scientific Institution* (Stanford: British Society for the History of Science, 1994) and Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1959) offer in-depth accounts of the formation and early history of the Society

<sup>3</sup> John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 152

the Reformation, they were assiduously taught not to take them at their face value'.<sup>4</sup> Divested of their agency in objective reality, the witnessing of apparitions or visions more generally was now evidential, Thomas argues, only of individual pathology and irrationality. Yet the investigative cultures formally inculcated at the close of the seventeenth century were never uniformly dismissive of unexplainable phenomena. Rather the fixed understanding of reality seemingly established by texts such as Isaac Newton's *Principia* (1686-7) arguably prompted the further study of invisible or immaterial forces, by investing these with the power to reveal hidden secrets about the orders of God and nature. Importantly, the founding of the Royal Society also signaled the beginning of an intense and prolonged period of scientific interest in the prophecies of the second-sighted Highlander.<sup>5</sup>

Although the focus of this thesis lies with second sight's discursive and conceptual migrations through the nineteenth century, it is necessary to acknowledge the late seventeenth and eighteenth century as the period in which this 'tradition' was formally instituted as an object of study. This is not to suggest that it is *only* the product of this epoch, accounts such as Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (1327) could be used to situate it much earlier, but rather that the narratives and imagery drawn on by later accounts is absolutely established here. This is most clearly evinced in the corpus of literature shaped throughout this epoch, then re-circulated and re-interpreted throughout the nineteenth century. For instance, despite his disparagement of the years '1660 to 1850', in his extensive treatment of topic given in multiple anthropological and folkloric studies, Lang relies primarily upon the examples and insights offered up by a relatively small set of texts all originally published prior to the Victorian age. Further, the closing years of the nineteenth century also saw Lang re-publish a tract on the subject dating from the 1680s and provide an introduction to a collection of prophecies made in the seventeenth century, Alexander Mackenzie's *The Prophecies of the Brahan Seer (Coinneach Odhar Fiosaiche)* (1899).<sup>6</sup> Like almost all of the material covered in this project, Lang's appreciation of second sight was one derived largely from textual sources like

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* [1971] (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 590

<sup>5</sup> William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985) pp. 9-10

<sup>6</sup> In *The Making of Religion* (London, 1888) to give an example, Lang leans on the work of Henry More, Joseph Glanvill and Robert Boyle to provide a British context for his discussion of the topic (41-46). Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth, An Essay on the Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and for the Most Part) Invisible People, Heretofore Going Under the Name of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* [1691], with comment by Andrew Lang and an introduction by R.B. Cunninghame Graham (Enemas MacKay: Stirling, 1893)

dedicated annuals, antiquarian collections of strange superstitions, travel journals, transcribed ballads and traditional tales. As such, much of the work of this thesis involves tracing the patterns made by particular histories of second sight, as they are taken up and reconstituted to fit the requirements of new observational regimes. In addition to providing later researchers with an extensive literature, early studies into this peculiar visionary power also established a methodological and philosophical framework for later scientific investigations into the supernatural. Though their motives remain particular, the texts covered by this chapter share common ground in the application of empiricist standards of evidence to a phenomenon positioned on the margins of the natural realm.

In proposing to cover the period between 1660 and 1830, this chapter will necessarily engage some rather broad-brush strokes and it is certainly not my aim to provide any detailed account of this revolutionary and culturally complex history. Instead this opening chapter will establish several areas of interest and enquiry, the thematics and imagery of which reverberate through the following four chapters. The first of these concerns a topic that has already been alluded to, namely how, why, by whom and for whom histories of second sight were first produced. Reading this phenomenon as largely the product of the increased intellectual and creative traffic between England and Scotland in the years leading up to and following the Acts of Union in 1707, my concern lies with how the meanings and peculiarities of the second sight tradition were delineated and formalised as part of this ongoing dialogue.<sup>7</sup> Within the boundaries of this conversation the premonitory faculties of the Scottish Highlander composed a far from neutral topic, with investigations into the subject overlaid with overt national, cultural and religious meanings that reflected upon the turbulent nature of the time. Although the predictions associated with this power were ostensibly confined to everyday events in the seer's community—deaths, the arrival of unexpected visitors, the success or failure of a fishing trip and so on—they often performed distinctly political functions in their retelling. This is most apparent in visions and prophecies that clustered around the Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745, in which those loyal to the House of Stuart attempted to return the

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<sup>7</sup> There is an argument to be made that would situate this 'increased traffic' at a far earlier date: in 1603, say, when James I and his court headed south or in 1660 when several leading Scottish nobles were in ascendance after the Restoration, and studies such as Clare Jackson's *Restoration Scotland, 1660-1690: Royalist Politics, Religion and Ideas* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003) have pursued the history of these early connections. However, the focus of this chapter lies with second sight as a cultural phenomenon produced by the problematics of the Union and its restricted focus reflects this theme.



descendants of James VII to the throne, with the marital support of many of the Highland clans. Second-sighted visions of famous battles or invading English forces, in the hands of authors with Jacobite sympathies were habitually transformed into historical accounts of Hanoverian brutality, disguised as disinterested antiquarianism.<sup>8</sup> Considering second sight as both a subject and producer of history then, it is possible to read these foretellings as composing a kind of counter discourse capable of upsetting both dominant versions of history and also the agreed method for *telling* that history. The prophetic capabilities of the Highlander not only produced histories out of step with the rationalist progressivism of this new intellectual climate they also elevated persons usually barred from this literary culture to the lofty position of historian.

By the close of the eighteenth century, Scotland occupied a position of extraordinary cultural authority, with philosophers and scientists like Francis Hutcheson, John Millar, Thomas Reid, Adam Smith and David Hume developing a new synthetic account of human nature, historical process and social formation, and university cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh emerging as key contributors to a wider European Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> Yet within its borders, the country also housed the seeming antithesis to these values. The Highlands and Western Isles presented a society linguistically, culturally and religiously removed from the dominant Lowlands, where something like colonial conditions—cultural repression, military occupation and economic underdevelopment—prevailed. How this particular geographical area came to compose a repository for ancient superstition in an ‘enlightened’ age, or as Michael Hunter has it, ‘a cockpit where the reality of the preternatural could be soberly and scientifically tested’, is the subject of this chapter.<sup>10</sup> If, as Hugh Trevor-Roper and Malcolm Chapman have argued, the culture and ancient traditions of the Scottish Highlands are essentially eighteenth-century creations, then the narratives of second sight produced in this period speak to a similar set of political, scientific and literary developments.<sup>11</sup> As has been frequently noted, the ‘putting down’ of the 1745

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<sup>8</sup> William Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song: Political Myth and National Identity* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988) and Murray Pittock, *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999)

<sup>9</sup> George E. Davie, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (London: Historical Association, 1981) and Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: the Scots' Invention of the Modern World* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002)

<sup>10</sup> Michael Hunter, *The Occult Laboratory: Magic, Science and Second Sight in Late 17<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland* ed. Michael Hunter (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2001), p. 9

<sup>11</sup> See Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (London: Macmillan, 1992), *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), Hugh Trevor-Roper *The Invention of Scotland:*

rebellion precipitated a dramatic change in how the Highlands were portrayed and perceived by the dominant English speaking culture. In a process that culminated in the visit of King George IV to Edinburgh in 1822—the tartan pageantry of which was stage-managed by the historical novelist Walter Scott and the recently formed *Celtic Society of Edinburgh*—formally warlike Celtic barbarians were transformed into emblems of tragic heroism and poetic beauty.<sup>12</sup> Attending to travel narratives such as Martin Martin’s *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (1703), Thomas Pennant’s *A Tour in Scotland* (1769) and Samuel Johnson’s *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775), attention is paid to how the opening up of the Highlands to English and Lowland tourists worked to locate second sight as one element of a richly imagined ‘primitive’ culture.

The mapping and exploration of northern territories is significant on two fronts. On the one hand, journeys undertaken through this ‘wild’ landscape were increasingly mediated through travelogues, histories and antiquarian studies; all of which guided the observer to ‘what is worth looking at, how it looks, and perhaps most important of all, how it should be looked at’.<sup>13</sup> Acting in collusion with Enlightenment theories of development that understood the Highlands as representative of an earlier stage of society, these observational strategies directed attention to the presence of archaic customs, feudal clans and superstitious beliefs, soon to be eradicated by the march of progress. The power of second sight was one of the traditions typically marked out for inevitable destruction: as an essay from 1777 remarks, ‘it is admitted even by the most credulous Highlanders, that as knowledge and industry are propagated in their country, the second sight disappears in proportion’.<sup>14</sup> On the other, concomitant with the opening up of this landscape to improvement and the doom this supposedly forecast for the Gaelic seer, a nascent Romantic movement identified the prophetic mountain dweller as its eternal muse. Attending to this history entails a dual reading: on the one hand the mountainous wildness of the Highland landscape and the melancholy fate of its people were made the subjects of this movement, but at the same time the psychological or spiritual

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*Myth and History* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), and Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley, *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992)

<sup>12</sup>Hugh Trevor-Roper provides a succinct account of Scott’s role in 1822 visit in the posthumously published, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 191-216

<sup>13</sup>Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 23

<sup>14</sup>James Beattie, ‘A Description of the Highlands and Remarks on the Second Sight of its Inhabitants’, *Sentimental Magazine* (March 1777), 110-2 (111)

mechanics of second sight begun to serve as an analogue for the mysterious visionary experience of the creative process itself. Closing with the new paradigms of perception opened up by the ascendant discourses of animal magnetism, my interest here is with the pull between the universalising claims being made by this new heterodox science and the continued assertion of the power as one specific to the ‘temperament’ of the Highlander. The construction of the Highlands in this period, as both barbarous and Edenic, beyond civilising and under threat by civilisation, superstitious and anciently wise, in turn produces second sight, and it is only by attending to these dichotomies that a clearer picture of this history emerges. Privileging altered states of dreaming, reverie and trance as sites at which the human imagination is empowered to transcend the familiar and the commonplace, Romantics engaged with second sight as a means of illuminating the connectedness of mind and body, soul and nature.

### 1.1 SECOND SIGHT AND HISTORY

In a letter to Samuel Pepys in 1700, the antiquarian and former Bishop of Thetford Dr. George Hickes recalled an interview with Janet Douglas, a young girl who had recently precipitated something close to civil unrest in two of Scotland’s largest cities. Claiming the power of second sight, Douglas had applied the faculty to the identification of witches and the traces of dark magic underwriting the ill fortunes of her friends and neighbours. Having made ‘such tumults and commotions among the people in Glaskow’ Hickes reports ‘the magistrates thought fit to confine her and sent an account of her to the Privy Counsell at Edinburgh’. Her arrival into the capital, however, precipitated something close to a state of civil unrest:

People went out to meet her vast crouds, and as she was surrounded with them she accused severall persons of witchcraft, which oblieged [sic] them to put her in close confinement, to keep the people and their minds quiet from the commotions she had raised in them<sup>15</sup>

This peculiar episode is enlightening in several respects. In terms of the British history of witchcraft, the relatively late date of Douglas’s accusations and the

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<sup>15</sup> George Hickes to Samuel Pepys 19 June 1700, quoted in Michael Hunter, *The Occult Laboratory*, pp. 172-8

seriousness with which they appear to have been taken by both the public and the judiciary gives over a brief impression of the ideological role witchcraft continued to play in Scotland, as the last trials were being held south of the border. The prosecution of witches in this period encoded not only the special character of the Presbyterian Kirk but also, as Ian Bostridge has demonstrated, ‘an assertion of that right to national government, an assertion of Scottish propriety and identity in the face of English scoffing’.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, this case also illustrates the ambivalent and contradictory position occupied by the power of second sight in relation to witchcraft. That Douglas was confident in claiming, publically and with some frequency, that her visionary faculty was an agent of the law capable of rooting out evildoers, suggests a firm distinction between punishable and commendable forms of magical activity. Where parliamentary legislation had decreed in 1579 that persons claiming ‘knowledge of prophetic[sic]’ would on first offence lose an ear and on the second be hanged, in the latter half of the seventeenth century second sight appears to have taken on the character of the kinds of helpful magic—divination, folk medicine, charms—traditionally performed by ‘cunning folk’.<sup>17</sup> Yet the implied neutrality and functionality of Douglas’s extraordinary ability is somewhat undermined by the social havoc her pronouncements instigated, which gestures instead to the disruptive potentials of prophetic speech in the public realm. Finally, the epistolary framing of this narrative, written at the request of noted English man of letters, suggests a growing interest in the topic outside of Scotland, and the institution of newly detached mode of observation.

Within Scotland the prosecution of accused witches had begun to serve an explicitly political function, establishing the authority of domestic policy over the ‘loose morals, deistical opinions, Episcopal pretensions’ governing south of the border.<sup>18</sup> With the formation of the Royal Society of London in 1660, the question of witchcraft had indeed taken on new meanings for English intellectuals. Rather than signalling the decline of belief, as some members of the Kirk warned, the establishment of this scientific institution marked the beginning of a concerted effort on the part of several of its most respected members to *prove* its existence. Though

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations c. 1650-c. 1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 27

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Lizzie Henderson and Edward J. Corran, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001), p. 180 and see also Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003)

<sup>18</sup> Bostridge, p. 23

keen to distance themselves from the horrors of the trials themselves, prominent figures like Robert Boyle and Henry More made the case for witchcraft, along with other manifestations of supernatural agency, as a necessary metaphysical possibility. Supernatural or preternatural events remained essential, these theistic scientists maintained, because they offered proof of forces and worlds operating beyond the realm of the visible, material world, and by extension they confirmed the existence of God.<sup>19</sup> In the opening pages of his hugely successful pamphlet *Saducismus Triumphatus: Or, Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (1681) the Anglican divine Joseph Glanvill made clear exactly what was at stake in this project: ‘there is no one, that is not very much a stranger to this world but knows how atheism and infidelity have advanced in our days, and how open they dare to show themselves in assorting and disputing their cause’.<sup>20</sup> For Glanvill the inescapable end point of the fashionably sceptical attitude to apparitions and magical activity being popularised through the London’s network of coffee houses and pursued by ‘Hobbesian and Spinonzian principles’, was a denial of the resurrection itself and by extension, of immortality of the human soul; or as the philosopher Henry More summarised, ‘No Spirits, No God’.<sup>21</sup> In answer to this perceived threat, Glanvill and other like-minded members of the Royal Society compiled case histories of alleged metaphysical experiences, developed theoretical frameworks and sought out new methodologies for exploring the margins of the natural world. In other words, assured of the piety of empiricism, they sought to expand the scope of objective and scientifically orientated observation into the realm of the immaterial or the supernatural.

In the late seventeenth century, members of the recently founded Royal Society enquired into second sight with the intention of exploiting rather than exploding this Scottish tradition: as Glanvill confidently informs his reader, there are ‘Innumerable Stories’ related to it and in the majority of these, ‘there is nothing,

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to suggest any firm consensus existed between the members of the Royal Society on religious topics. Henry More, for example, under the influence of a Platonic tradition, diverged from Boyle’s mechanistic principles, proposing instead that the activity of a ‘hylarchic spirit’ needed to be considered in order to fully understand the workings of nature

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus: Or, Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (London: J. Collins and S. Lownds, 1681), p. 3 ‘Sadducism triumphed over’, Sadducism meaning skepticism or disbelief regarding the veracity of supernatural witnessing or experience. Glanvill’s text ran through several editions before 1681 including *A Philosophical Endeavour towards the Defense of the Being Witches and Apparitions* (1666) and *A Blow at Modern Sadducism* (1668).

<sup>21</sup> George Sinclair, *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered* (1685), (London: T.G. Stevenson, 1871) p. ixxx and Henry More, *An Against Atheisme* (London: Roger Daniel, 1653), p. 64

either improbable or unlikely'.<sup>22</sup> Co-opted into a wider scheme that explicated preternatural happenings as the further evidence of God's omnipresence, the strange visionary powers of the Highlander provided particularly compelling evidence for the claims of natural theology. In the first instance, as Michael Hunter has also noted, the stories associated with this uncanny prescience lacked 'the bizarre quality of the witchcraft narrative'.<sup>23</sup> Usually concerned with everyday happenings—deaths, the arrival of strangers into town, a loss of livestock—second sight did not connote the fantastical or the diabolical in quite the same way the dark rumours and deathly covens associated with witchery. Beyond the relative mundanity of their content, the narrative structure of these localised prophecies encoded a kind of pre-determined verifiability: a vision that claims to forecast future events is after all, remarkable only after its version of the future is confirmed. Finally, though researchers were rarely able to claim direct knowledge of this phenomenon, narratives of second- sight—unlike those associated with witchcraft—could be fashioned into reliable and trustworthy forms of testimony. In an exchange on the topic between the chemist Robert Boyle and the Scottish aristocrat and Fellow of the Royal Society Lord Tarbat, for example, the latter avows that he had initially felt 'much indisposed, to believe any such stories', but having travelled in the Highlands and spoken with its people he found himself assured of the veracity of 'that scarce credible gift'.<sup>24</sup> Illustrating Glanvill's proposition that, the 'best notes of distinction between miracles and forgeries, divine and diabolical ones are in the circumstances of the persons, ends and issues', Tarbat finds himself convinced by the power of testimony heard firsthand from seemingly dependable witnesses.<sup>25</sup> This reliability was one predicated on both the apparent guilelessness of the Gaelic subject and the assuredly unsought or uncultivated nature of the 'gift' itself.

Established in these early investigations is a model of authoritative reporting cultivated by subsequent treatments of the subject, in which the 'factual' nature of the imparted instances is pressed through the employment of particular stylistic conventions.<sup>26</sup> A narrative recorded in Theophilus Insulanus's *Treaties on Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (1763) is typical of this strategy. First the subject is named,

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<sup>22</sup> Glanvill, p. 53

<sup>23</sup> *The Occult Laboratory*, p. 9

<sup>24</sup> Lord Tarbat cited in *The Occult Laboratory*, p. 52

<sup>25</sup> Glanvill, p. 58

<sup>26</sup> See Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994)

‘Christine MacKinnon’, her occupation given, ‘serving’ in the home of a ‘William Mathison’, and before details of the second-sighted prediction are given, we are assured that she is ‘a woman of good report’. The experience, ‘declared’ to the author, concerns the witnessing of ‘her master wrapped in a winding sheet, laid on a bed close to the fire side, with a piece of linen from under his chin tied to the crown of his head’, the symbolism of which indicates the immanence of death. So that in the closing sentence of this case study, we learn of the sad fulfilment of this vision: ‘In a few weeks he sickened, but lay in a back house till the last night of his life, where he expired under the circumstances related.’<sup>27</sup> If the reader remains unconvinced as to the veracity of this particular story, then the sheer volume of evidence presented for their consideration may still persuade them. Having provided over two hundred alleged instances of second sight Insulanus asserts the demonstrative value of this bulk of testimony: ‘What better proof can be required for the truth of Second Sight, than upwards of a hundred instances that have been exactly fulfilled; according to the most candid testimony of persons of all ranks, who lived in remoter ages and centuries, as they are delivered down to posterity by the best historians’.<sup>28</sup> Acknowledging their lack of primary documentation and empirically verifiable evidence, histories of second sight like John Frazer’s *Deuteroscopia (Second Knowledge); Or a Brief Discourse Concerning Second Sight* (1707) and James Macpherson’s *Treaties on Second Sight* (1761), rely upon what the lexicographer and essayist Samuel Johnson would later describe as the ‘force of testimony’ attendant upon the subject.<sup>29</sup>

Common to all sympathetic accounts of second sight, from the late seventeenth century to at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, is the assertion of the seer’s good character and of the unsought nature of their strange ability. Unlike witchcraft or related methods of divination, second sight is repeatedly presented as an entirely uncultivated gift. In an early study by a Scottish correspondent of Robert Boyle, the University of Glasgow’s George Sinclair, we learn that the power may originally have arisen ‘by a compact with the Devil’, but those who have inherited it ‘by succession’ are ‘innocent and have this *Sight* against

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<sup>27</sup>Theophilus Insulanus, *Treaties on Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (Edinburgh: Ruddiman, Auld and Company, 1763), p. 3 ‘Theophilus Insulanus’ was the pseudonym of the Rev. Donald McLeod, of Hamer in Skye

<sup>28</sup>Insulanus, *Treaties on Second Sight*, p. 135

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775) (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1785), p. 254

their will and inclination'.<sup>30</sup> Along similar lines an investigator in 1716 concluded that, the 'Seers are generally illiterate, and well-meaning People, and altogether void of design, nor could I ever learn that any of them made the least gain by it, neither is it reputable among them to have that Faculty; the usually sceptical Samuel Johnson avowed that those 'who profess to feel it, do not boast of it as a privilege, nor are considered by others as advantageously distinguished. They have no temptation to feign'; and the antiquarian John Aubrey recorded that 'the thing is very troublesome to them that have it, and would gladly be rid of it. For if the object be a thing that is so terrible, they are seen to sweat and tremble, and shriek [sic] at the apparition'.<sup>31</sup> Occurring at random and without volition, often featuring sad or distressing events and frequently characterised as akin to a curse, second sight appears to embody a kind of self-evident 'truth'. This model of trustworthy witnessing relies upon the construction and constant re-iteration of the seer as by nature unknowing, simple and entirely without artifice. Before moving on to consider how we might begin to understand the Highland identity pursued by these studies within a wider cultural context, it is necessary to attend to the potentially political implications of the deliberate framing of these narratives as unconsciously produced.

The frequently banal character of many reported visions—a visit by a long-lost relative is predicted, pregnancies or marriages foretold—suggest the performance of an almost pastoral role within rural communities, while their apparent randomness appears to imply a kind of hermeneutic neutrality. Yet these visions not only took place within a politically and religiously charged historical moment, they also participated in the construction of that history. From Lord Tarbat's encounter with a seer whilst on the run from Oliver Cromwell's troops during the Interregnum who foresees the arrival of Parliamentary troops into Ullapool, to the invasion of Eigg led by Major Robert Ferguson in 1689 being predicted four years prior by one its inhabitants, second sight often reflected upon events that resonated beyond their immediate locality.<sup>32</sup> A significant number of fulfilled and recorded prophecies, for instance, attended to battles fought during the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745. In Thomas Pennant's *A Tour of Scotland* (1776) the usually sceptical Welshman

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<sup>30</sup>George Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, p. 21

<sup>31</sup> M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: A. Bell, 1716), p. 309, Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Isles*, p. 254 and John Aubrey, *Miscellanies Upon Various Subjects* (1696) (London: John Russell Smith, 1857) p. 184

<sup>32</sup> John Frazer's *Deuteroscopia (Second Knowledge); Or a Brief Discourse Concerning Second Sight* (Edinburgh, 1707) is the first text to record the Eigg prophecy



concedes to one ‘well-attested’ instance of second sight concerning the prophecy made by the Hanoverian Commissioner Duncan Forbes, in which he predicted the location of the Battle of Culloden: ‘being at his house in Culloden [...], Mr Forbes suddenly turning to the window said, All these things may fall out, but depend on it, all these disturbances will be terminated on this spot.’<sup>33</sup> Considering the loyalty of many of the clans to the Stuart dynasty and the common conflation of the Highland population with Jacobitism, such visions possessed an unmistakably political resonance. As Juliet Feibel has remarked, it is not insignificant that many early investigations into second sight were undertaken by scholars with avowed Jacobite allegiances, and that the stories included in their studies tended to permit a sympathetic reading of the defeated rebellion. Following a standard pattern, ‘a Highlander predicts the appearance of English military forces, who then arrive to wreak havoc on those suspected of supporting the Stuarts’, these visions publicised Hanoverian brutality and opened up that history to different readings.<sup>34</sup>

Second sight involves the employment of privileged or local knowledge, as it is only through the correct appreciation of a vision’s symbolism that meaning is ascertained. The Welsh antiquarian Edward Lhuyd, for example, reported that, ‘the men with the second sight see a man with a light like the light of the glow worm, or with fish [scales] over his hair and clothes’, an uncanny vision that only takes on meaning—that the man is ‘to be drowned’—for those capable of decoding its symbolism.<sup>35</sup> Prophetic visions of Jacobite victories or English insurgencies were similarly open to occulted readings. Performing a function comparable to that of a ghostly revenant revisiting its earthly habitation to right injustice or mete out revenge, second-sighted visions of the uprisings, distributed under the guise of seemingly apolitical annuals of strange superstitions, offered to resurrect a ‘true’ account of events.<sup>36</sup> Respecting Silki Stroh’s assertion that ‘postcolonial discourse patterns can temporarily co-exist with colonial ones’, it is possible to read these recorded visions

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Pennant’s *A Tour in Scotland* (London: B. White, 1776), p. 155

<sup>34</sup> Juliet Feibel, ‘Highland Histories: Jacobitism and Second Sight’, *Clio* 30:1 (2000), 51-77 (65)

<sup>35</sup> Edward Lhuyd, *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs: copied by Edward Lhuyd from the manuscript of the Rev. James Kirkwood (1650-1709) and annotated by him with the aid of the Rev. John Beaton (1699-1700)*

<sup>36</sup> The counterpoint to these pro-Jacobite examples is a pamphlet published anonymously in 1745, *The Young Pretender’s Destiny Unfolded: Being an Exact Account of Several Prodiges Seen in the Highlands Before the Breaking Out of the Present Rebellion*, which purports to record several yet-to-be-fulfilled predictions regarding the triumphant capture of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the glorious defeat of the rebels

as having contributed to a political counter discourse.<sup>37</sup> If, as William Donaldson has suggested, patterns of Jacobite history ‘took the form of a series of heroic legends’ continually re-incorporated into the present through ‘mythogenic’ processes, then the uncanny projections offered by this prophetic temporality must be considered to have formed part of these messianic narratives.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the acknowledged participation of the second-sighted Highlander in creating stories and legends that attend upon significant nation changing events, recast that figure as not only an object of historical study, but also a producer of history.

In representing the past through prophecies of the future, or in revivifying the spectre of a violent past in the present, these visions produced narratives largely at odds with the conditions of eighteenth-century historiography. Where a work like David Hume’s *History of England* (1754-62), which sweeps from the ‘invasion of Julius Caesar’ to the ‘Revolution of 1688’, exemplified the conjectural ideal of a progress driven, forward-looking grand narrative, second-sight is antithetical to linear formations of time, conflating the present with the future, so that the effect is ascertained before its cause comes into existence. At stake here is not only the question of what constitutes history or what is the proper subject of the historian, but importantly who is qualified to write it. For a particular eighteenth-century sensibility, which valorised the ability to map the passage of time as a key distinguishing factor between civilised and savage races, the illiterate and warlike Highlander could not easily be accommodated as a contributor to that process.<sup>39</sup> As Steven Shapin proposes, ‘Experience suitable for philosophical inference had to emerge from those sorts of people fit reliably and sensibly to have it’, and the ghostly reporting of a remote people did not constitute appropriate ‘experience’.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, considering the crucial role of ‘letters’ in Enlightenment conceptions of civilised life, the apparent absence of Gaelic literature or civic records called into question the ability of such a race to reflect accurately upon their own lives. As Johnson observed during his 1773 trip to the Hebrides, ‘we soon found what memorials were to be expected from an

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<sup>37</sup> Silki Stroh, *Uneasy Subjects: Postcolonialism and Scottish Gaelic Poetry* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi Press, 2011), p. 21

<sup>38</sup> William Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song: Political Myth and National Identity* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. 15. Murray Pittock makes similar argument in *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and Scottish Identity 1638 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1991)

<sup>39</sup> See Mark Salber Phillip’s *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain 1740-1840* (2000), James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (1998) and Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (1995)

<sup>40</sup> Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, p. 94

illiterate people, whose whole time is a series of distress': unable to write his own history, the islander lacks the capacity to analyse, learn from or influence events.<sup>41</sup> This exclusion is conceptualised in terms of vision, in 'nations, where there is hardly the use of letters, what is once out of sight is lost forever'.<sup>42</sup> The Highlander has no history and no future, being only a creature of the present buffeted by forces outside of control. Considering the definition of folklore, however, as 'the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture', which is 'transmitted by word or mouth or by customary examples', it is possible to interpret the second-sighted vision as having propagated unwritten, alternative or otherwise un-sanctioned accounts.<sup>43</sup>

Prophecies attending to the Jacobite uprisings, re-circulated and hardened into myth by annuals like Frazer's *Deuteroscopia* or Macpherson's *Treaties on Second Sight*, contributed to a wider cultural obsession with these events in latter half of the eighteenth century and pressing to an increasingly mythologised version of Scottish history. The Battle of Culloden marked not only the final defeat of the Jacobite rebellion that had at one point threatened London and occupied Edinburgh, but also a turning point in the relations between Britain's newly constituent nations.<sup>44</sup> Though its significance has perhaps been overstated, it remains arguable that the finality of the 1746 defeat and the draconian laws that followed in its wake precipitated a dramatic change in wider perceptions of Highland society and culture. In the immediate aftermath of the Hanoverian victory the north was, as Saree Makdisi notes, 'opened up to a process of colonization'.<sup>45</sup> Measures were taken to bring this unruly territory under the jurisdiction of centralised British authorities: traditional forms of dress and music were banned, landowners who had pledged allegiance to the Stuarts lost their titles and permanent military garrisons were established. Though by 1782 the Highland population was deemed tame enough to wear plaid once more and elements of the Acts of Proscription were duly repealed, this softened legislative attitude was paralleled by the institution of a programme of increasingly violent forced evictions. Empowered by the collapse of the old feudal system and justified by a rhetoric of improvement, the Clearances saw crofters moved off the land to make

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<sup>41</sup> *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland*, p. 89

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79

<sup>43</sup> Jan Harold Bruvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction* (New York: Norton, 1986), p. 4

<sup>44</sup> See Charles Wither's 'The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands' in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, eds. Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), pp. 143-156

<sup>45</sup> Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 76

way for more profitable sheep farming, an aggressive upheaval that precipitated waves of mass emigration to the colonies. As several eighteenth-century scholars have delineated, the repercussions of these severe laws and the rapid depletion of the populous precipitated a significant shift in cultural perception. After the rebellion, as Hugh Trevor-Roper acerbically has it, ‘Celtic barbarians who so recently had been denounced and feared as vagabonds, thieves, blackmailers and rebels, but were now found to be helpless and impotent, gradually acquired the romantic charm of an endangered species’.<sup>46</sup> Transformed from a site of pagan savagery and backwardness, to a mythologically powerful representation of an ancient and noble culture under imminent threat from the forces of modernity, the Highlands came to serve increasingly as a point around which narratives of Scottish history and national identity in a post Union context could form.<sup>47</sup>

Charged with stage managing the tartan pageantry of George IV’s visit to Edinburgh in 1822, during which the newly anointed ‘Jacobite’ King was garbed in the red plaid of the Stuarts, Sir Walter Scott has often served as an emblem for the wildly revisionist histories at stake in this remaking of the Highlands.<sup>48</sup> In his hugely popular *Waverley: or ‘Tis Sixty Years Since*, published anonymously 1814, Scott remarks that, ‘There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, has undergone so complete a change as this Kingdom of Scotland’ a change so great as ‘to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth’s time’.<sup>49</sup> Though there is a detectable note of pride in the author’s description of accelerated social change, the evocation of a lost bond between the generations also suggests the dissolution of a shared identity and history.<sup>50</sup> The final rebellion is identified as the catalyst for this rapid modernisation, and Scott’s fictionalised return to this battleground encodes concurrently a mourning for an extinct past, a desire for historical closure and an attempt to forge a new national narrative from the embers of

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<sup>46</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 84

<sup>47</sup> In *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), Robert Crawford discusses Scott’s literary work primarily in terms of the ‘amalgams’ they form between English and Scottish social life: which are ‘attached to Scottish culture, yet fully in favour of the British identity’ (117)

<sup>48</sup> See Hugh Trevor-Roper, ‘The Invention of Tradition’ in *The Invention of Tradition* eds. Terrence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm (1983)

<sup>49</sup> Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, ‘Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814), ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 340

<sup>50</sup> See Daniel Cottom, *The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

events about to slip from living memory. The novel charts the progress of its English-born hero Edward Waverley as he journeys from the civilised south to the wild north on a commission from the Hanoverian army, where he crosses paths with a group of Highlanders loyal to the Jacobite cause. Eventually won over by the courage and fidelity of the Clan Mac-Ivor, Waverley converts to the Jacobite cause and fights at the Battle of Prestonpans. The novel closes with Edward, having saved the life of an English colonel and thus escaped retribution for his rebellious activities, marrying Rose Bradwardine, an aristocratic Lowland Scot. As many critical readings of the text have asserted, *Waverley* consecrates the long troubled union between Scotland and England, smoothing over the destructive aftermath of Culloden and realising a version of events in keeping with the teleology of Enlightenment historiography.<sup>51</sup>

Essential to our understanding of second sight in this period is how *Waverley* negotiates myths of nationhood in relation to the folklore of a re-imagined and redeployed Highlands. Adapting the labyrinthine plotting, atmospheric settings and intense subjectivities of the Gothic novel to historicist themes, the text's uncanny elements find their literal embodiment in Fergus MacIvor, chief of the Clan MacIvor and representative of an old feudal order. In possession of the second sight—when he meets Edward in Edinburgh, he reminds him “‘Said the Highland prophet sooth? Or must second-sight go for nothing?’”—it is Fergus who prophesies his own death and the inevitable downfall of his clan in the ‘Bodach Glas’.<sup>52</sup> Where we have previously observed the second-sighted prophecy as itself a form of history, *Waverley* captures this tradition as an object of historical inquiry.<sup>53</sup> Adopting the role of a detached cultural historian, Scott embeds the novel with paratextual material: extensive editorial footnotes, poetic fragments, found manuscripts and collected superstitions. This allows the author, as Robert Crawford has suggested, to ‘make use of the immediacy of the adventurous narrative at the same time as introducing a historicizing note’, to negotiate deftly distance and proximity in relation to his

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<sup>51</sup>See Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiations of the British Nation, 1707-1830* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), and Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London: Macmillan, 1989)

<sup>52</sup> *Waverley*, p. 261 and p. 372

<sup>53</sup> Mark Salber Philips has discussed the distancing techniques implied by the title: ‘*Waverley; or ‘Tis Sixty Years Since*. He writes that ‘Scott understood that two generations marked the natural limit of living memory. Sixty year was a privileged distance for the kind of history he had in mind’, *On Historical Distance*, p. 82

Highland subjects.<sup>54</sup> This rationalising retrospect is particularly evident in the collected edition of his *Waverley Novels*, published with notation between 1829 and 1833, in which Scott tempers the novels' supernatural incidents through the addition of measured editorial commentary. The narrative distance this creates serves to frame second sight, along with its Jacobite practitioners, as an object of nostalgic affection.

In a note on *Rob Roy*, for instance, Scott discusses at length a seventeenth-century treatise on Scottish fairy lore, Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* and recounts the strange circumstances of the author's death: 'he is believed himself to have been taken away by the fairies, in revenge, perhaps, for having let in too much light upon the secrets of their commonwealth'.<sup>55</sup> Incredulous but nonetheless fascinated by 'the ancient traditions and high spirit of a people, who, living in a civilised age and country, retained so strong a tincture of manners belonging to an early period of society', Scott confined these seemingly outmoded customs to an un-civilised past geographically and historically embodied by the Highlands.<sup>56</sup> In regard to second sight, which also appears in *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), *A Legend of Montrose* (1819) and *The Antiquary* (1816), this enacts an almost disempowering influence: co-opted into a broader imagining of picturesque and antediluvian Highland manners, second sight foregoes its power to unsettle and upend. This is most clear in a note given in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, a collection of ballads published between 1802 and 1803, which states that according to his 'learned and excellent fiend, Mr. Ramsay of Ochertyre' a man named 'Macoan' residing in Appin, was 'the last person eminently gifted with the second sight'.<sup>57</sup> No longer a sensational spectacle or a disruptive prophetic speech, second sight signifies only a lost past rendered affectively accessible through fiction.

By fashioning the Highland past as creative resource for the Union and in consigning superstitious thinking to these temporal and geographic co-ordinates, *Waverley* most obviously accords with the understanding of civilisation propounded by Enlightenment thinkers: the governance of universal laws, the inevitability of rational progress and sweeping perspective sanctioned by the conjectural method in

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<sup>54</sup> Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, p. 117

<sup>55</sup> Walter Scott, *Rob Roy* 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1830), vol. 2 p. 179

<sup>56</sup> Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft addressed to J. G. Lockhart Esq.* (London: Murray, 1830), p. 14

<sup>57</sup> Walter Scott, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border: Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads Collected in the Southern Counties of Scotland with a Few of Modern Date, Founded upon Local Tradition* (1802-3) 3 vols. (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1810), p. 159

history. This is complicated somewhat by a tension present in Scott's writing, and in eighteenth-century culture more widely, between the modalities of the local and the self-authenticating claims of the universal. As we will see in later chapters, this philosophical and methodological conflict finds expression in many investigative regimes and greatly informs the readings of second sight produced by those discourses. Within this particular context this dialectic informs the division between antiquarianism and the principles of Enlightenment historiography. With the granting of a Royal Charter to The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1783, antiquarianism was formally recognised as not only a gentlemanly pursuit but also as an authoritative mode of academic enquiry.<sup>58</sup> Pioneered in the late seventeenth century by figures like John Leyland and Edmund Gibson, antiquarianism drew upon the language of empiricism to collect and preserve the relics of extinct or marginal cultures. Importantly, 'relics' implied not only the remnants of physical structures but also the remains of folk beliefs and practices.

Despite its inauguration as a recognised discipline, the vision of history promoted by the work of antiquarians, which privileges 'the particular over the general, the rare over the representative, the empirical over the theoretical', is one that arguably ran contrary to the theories of human progress and historical process guiding Enlightenment thought.<sup>59</sup> Though antiquarians frequently sought to align their work with Humean or Smithian principles of circulation and sympathy, ultimately their insistence on the value of the strange, the singular and the forgotten led to the production of distinctly non-linear narratives that ultimately stood apart from those produced by the Science of Man. As Susan Manning has outlined, for Hume 'antiquaries failed to register the power of memory and imagination in creating a continuous picture of reality; their activities lacked self-reflection, punctuation, and perspective [...] they concerned themselves with the past as recuperable only in ruined form, not as part of a chain of progress'.<sup>60</sup> This conflict with philosophical history could be conceptualised as an expression of the relation between the national

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<sup>58</sup> Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 8 On the history of antiquarianism and the Enlightenment also see Kelly E. Burns, *The Antiquarian Impulse: History, Affect and Material Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (2008) and Stuart Piggott, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination: Ideas from the Renaissance to the Regency* (1989)

<sup>59</sup> Mike Goode, 'Dryasdust Antiquarianism and Sappy Masculinity: The Waverly Novels and the Gender of History', *Representations* 82 (2003), 53-86 (61)

<sup>60</sup> Susan Manning, 'Antiquarianism and the Scottish Science of Man' in Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen eds, *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57-76 (64-65)

and the local in eighteenth-century Britain, wherein the paratactic impulse of the antiquarian is imagined as privileging peripheral peculiarities over the need to construct universalising or unifying historicism.

For their part, antiquarians sought to emphasise what customs and ways of being British culture stood to lose in the march of progress. John Aubrey, for example, justified the practice as a means of preserving the traditions of seventeenth-century rural England against the quickening pace of modern life: 'Before Printing, Old-wives Tales were ingeniose, and since Printing came in fashion [...] the many good Bookes [...] have putt all the old Fables out of doors'.<sup>61</sup> While the printing press might have 'frighted away Robin-goodfellow and the Fayries' in Wiltshire, the Highlands remained understood as a primarily oral culture. Originally attracted north by the promise of megalithic remains that were potentially evidential of ancient Druidic traditions, Aubrey's taste for the remarkable led him to investigate the rumors of supernatural vision amongst the local populace in the late 1690s. The results of this were collated in a chapter of *Miscellanies* (1696), which provided one of the first accounts of second sight to be published in English. Advertised on the front page of this collection of supernatural happenings, 'An Account of Second-Sighted Men in Scotland' is composed of the replies Aubrey received to eight questions. Querying the origin and moral nature of this form of foreknowledge, as well as requesting details as to the type of visions seen and the character of the seers themselves, Aubrey's appeal solicited a highly varied range of responses from a diverse selection of anonymous correspondents: a minister living near Inverness reports that only 'sad and dismal' events compose the visions and that the power of sight is a troublesome one which most would gladly rid themselves; another proposes that those with the second sight can see events to come within three or four years subsequent to the vision and that though 'Godly' people frequently have the sight, most judge it sinful and public prayers are made to expunge it; and a gentleman's son from Strathspey claims that seers are able to predict happy events as well as sad, and that visions arrive 'visibly acted before their eyes; sometimes within, and sometimes without-doors as in a glass'.<sup>62</sup> Of these reports Aubrey comments little, rather—in

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<sup>61</sup> Oliver L. Dick ed., *Aubrey's Brief Lives* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950), p. xxxiii

<sup>62</sup> John Aubrey, *Miscellanies* (London, 1696), pp. 185-92



line with the rest of *Miscellanies*, they are presented as a simple collection of wondrous and fascinating instances.<sup>63</sup>

As part of what Malcolm Chapman has described as a ‘sustained bias towards a romanticised Celtic fringe’ in which ‘ancient’ Highland customs become almost synecdochal for folk traditions in general, the antiquarian urge to catalogue such customs was matched by a wider shift in interest toward Britain’s Celtic cultures and their native resources.<sup>64</sup> Confined to what Ina Ferris has termed ‘the most unsettling modality of the ‘almost’, the Highlands came to embody a way of life and set of customs preserved but under imminent threat from the civilising forces of modernisation and improvement.<sup>65</sup> Collections such as Thomas Pinkerton’s *Ancient Scottish Poems* (1786), Walter Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3) and James Hogg’s *The Mountain Bard* (1807) take the form of literary antiquarianism, in which the fairy lore and supernatural traditions of rural Bardic cultures are re-transcribed and preserved for a national audience. This ethnographic exploration of the ‘local’ can be read as a project geared toward a creation of the national: the collecting of oral ballads and the valorisation of vernacular poetry helps to create an identifiably ‘Scottish’ literary identity, imagined in a post-Union context. Yet the Highlander is conspicuously absent from this national endeavour: the superstitions, ancient manners and mythological histories of the Highlands here compose a resource for, rather than a contributor to new British narratives.

## 1.2 HIGHLAND GEOGRAPHIES

Second sight is a tradition subject to both temporal and geographical mapping. In terms of the stadial systems of social development proposed by philosophers such as Adam Smith and Alex Ferguson, the Highlands existed as a contemporary reflection of a savage and superstitious past, set off from the civil present spatially embodied in the institutions and industry of cities like Edinburgh and Glasgow. Considering the

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<sup>63</sup> Aubrey’s chapter ‘An Accurate Account of Second-Sighted Men’, extracted and re-published in several later studies: John Beaumont’s *Historical, Physiological and Theological Treatise of Spirits, Apparitions, Witchcrafts and other Magical Practices* (1705) and Theophilus Insulanus’s *A Treatise on Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (1763)

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth*, p. 117, he goes on to argue that ‘The congruence of Celt and the ‘folk’ in the popular imagination produces, through a kind of back-formation, a ‘Celtising’ of British folk-art in general, wherever it comes from’ (117)

<sup>65</sup> Ina Ferris, ‘Melancholy, Memory, History’, in *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, eds. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 77-93 (82)

Highlands as, in line with Saree Makdisi, ‘a colonized territory’ spatially recoded and ‘put to use in various ways’, attention can be paid to the role played by folklore in the imaginative re-creation and bordering of this cultural space.<sup>66</sup> In Walter Scott’s short story ‘The Two Drovers’ collected in *The Chronicles of Canongate* (1827), second sight functions as a dynamic metaphor for problematic disjunctions between the local and national, English and Scottish, Highland and Lowland. The tale concerns the murder of Harry Wakefield by Robin Oig M’Combich, after a misunderstanding arises over the pasture for their cattle. After being beaten by Harry, Robin avenges himself by plunging his dirk into Harry’s chest: ‘You, Harry Wakefield, showed me to-day how the Saxon churls fights—I show you now how the Highland dunniewassel fights’.<sup>67</sup> Second sight, which foreshadows events when his aunt perceives English blood on Robin’s hand long before the fight, also serves to express the failure of vision that precipitates tragedy. The inability of the Englishman to ‘see’ the Highlander clearly, as a nobleman rather than a herder, arguably serves as a metaphor for the fragility of the Union itself and brings to the fore the difficulties of aligning disparate cultural histories under a national banner.<sup>68</sup> One year after its publication the story was dramatised by Henry Goff for the London stage, with a new title: *Second Sight; or, A Prediction*.<sup>69</sup> This development suggests two points of interest: that the story’s primary appeal to English audiences perhaps lay with its elucidation of this peculiar visionary ability, and secondly that in marketing his production to this audience Goff recognised the theatrical appeal of the prophetic Highland seer.<sup>70</sup>

Recent critical interventions by historians such as Colin Kidd, Katie Trumpener and Juliet Shields have sought to underline the role played by literature in producing and legitimising the newly united nation.<sup>71</sup> Stories of second sight occupied

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<sup>66</sup> Makdisi, p. 72

<sup>67</sup> Walter Scott, ‘The Two Drovers’, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* ed. M.H. Abrams 6<sup>th</sup> ed. vol. 2 (New York: Norton, 1993), pp. 299-320

<sup>68</sup> Jason Marc Harris has discussed ‘The Two Drovers’ along similar lines, and points to another short story from the *Chronicles of Canongate*, ‘The Highland Widow’, as performing a comparable function: he writes that ‘Scott in both cases shows Highland culture as a dangerous identity to accept’, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot and Burlington VT, 2008), pp. 198-9 (198)

<sup>69</sup> H. Phillip Bolton, *Scott Dramatised* (Nottingham: Mansell Press, 1992)

<sup>70</sup> Second sighted characters recur through many of Scott’s novels such as, *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), *A Legend of Montrose* (1819) and the *The Antiquary* (1816)

<sup>71</sup> See Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalisms: The Romance Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

a complex position in this amalgamating project. In the case of Daniel Defoe, whose *Review* propagandised the English cause in Scotland, pro-Union pamphleteering curiously mingled at times with stories of Highland superstition and second sight; as when in ‘The Second-Sighted Highlander, or The Scots New Prophecy’ (1712) the author claims the strange ‘Celestial’ ability to ‘discern of things to come’, before applying this to predict the country’s political future.<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere, the fabled vision speaks of the uniqueness of ‘North British’ culture, one not opposed to southern ways but individuated from these in terms of its antiquities, language, customs, poetry and landscape. In 1760 the imageries of Scottish seership obtained a significant audience with the controversial publication of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and Translated from Gaelic or Erse Language*. A cycle of epic poems narrated and authored by a third-century bard, and compiled and translated by James Macpherson, their publication occasioned a storm of debate concerning the true origins of this newly unearthed Celtic Homer.<sup>73</sup> As philosophers and literary scholars weighed in on either side, the collection enjoyed international success, with translations produced in nearly every European language, paintings depicting scenes from the poems exhibited widely, and a burgeoning Romantic movement gripped by the cult of Ossian. Published as relations grew increasingly strained between the two nations, these poems provided a means, as Trumpener has it, of drawing ‘English readers into an unfamiliar, threatening, and alien cultural world, making it appear to them, for the first time, as sublime, heroic and tragically doomed’.<sup>74</sup> Integral to this image of the Highlands as misty Gaelic other world, were the traditions of seership and prophesy clustered that around the third-century blind bard.<sup>75</sup> In a post-Union and post-Ossian context, second sight was increasingly taken up as a means of signifying the survival of a vernacular oral tradition unique to Scotland.

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<sup>72</sup> Daniel Defoe, ‘The Highland Visions, or The Scots New Prophecy’ (1712) quoted in *Bardic Nationalisms*, p. 98. Trumpener also discusses the publication of *The History of the Life and Adventures of Duncan Campbell* (1720), an account—usually attributed to Defoe—of a ‘Highland clairvoyant who created a London sensation’ (98)

<sup>73</sup> See Thomas M. Curely, *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

<sup>74</sup> As Trumpener notes, the poems appeared during a moment of virulent English anti-Scottish sentiment, in which the hated earl of Bute, Britain’s first prime minister, was popularly believed to give clannish preferment to his own countrymen’, p. 76-77

<sup>75</sup> See Edward Larrissy, ‘The Celtic Bard of Romanticism: Blindness and Second Sight’, *Romanticism* 5 (1999) 43-57 and Matthew Wickman ‘Of Mourning and Machinery’, in *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland’s ‘Romantick’ Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) pp. 140-170

In *Waverley* Scott's English protagonist completes a journey, one repeated in *Rob Roy* and *The Antiquary*, which sees him travel from the imperial metropole, through the civilised Lowlands and on to the remote and undomesticated north. Overcome on first glimpsing the mountainous terrain, with 'wild feelings of romantic delight' Edward Waverly is lured away from 'sober reason' by passions that will eventually lead him foolhardy into battle, passions that appear to originate in the landscape itself.<sup>76</sup> Enacted across both time and space, this crossing of the Highland Line entails an interaction with a radically different people and society, seemingly bound to an earlier stage of civilisation. Read as a travel narrative, situated in Tzvetan Todorov's terms between autobiography and science, interior and exterior positions, *Waverley* exoticises the Highlands as the embodiment of 'alterity': it is the richly imagined site of sentimental Jacobitism, superstitious fancy, lost heroism and romantic unrealities.<sup>77</sup> Yet in the same moment as he creates the Highlands as a place apart from the modern world, Scott's historical fiction also functioned as a blueprint for exploration. Dramatised for his readers was a journey that had been made by ever increasing numbers of travellers through the latter half of the eighteenth century. In search of archaic customs, feudal clans and wild landscapes, travellers north sought something akin to ethnographic encounter. As the essayist James Boswell explained in his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1775), the remote Western Isles promised the opportunity to 'contemplate a system of life almost totally different to what we had been accustomed to see; and, to find simplicity and wildness, and all the circumstances of remote time or place, so near to our native great island, was an object within the reach of reasonable curiosity.'<sup>78</sup> The moral injunction to explore the far reaches of one's country is not particular to the late eighteenth century, as early as 1698 Martin Martin had chastised the 'modern itch after the knowledge of foreign places is so prevalent that the generality of mankind bestow little time or thought upon the place of their nativity', but unique to this context is the increasingly ease with which such journeys could be made.<sup>79</sup> Newly constructed military roads, improved coach services and post-Culloden policing made travel safer, while the Napoleonic wars raging on the continent had, by the 1790s, vastly expanded the

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<sup>76</sup> *Waverley*, p. 75

<sup>77</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Origin of Genres', *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation*, 8.1 (1976) 159-7

<sup>78</sup> James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (1775) ed. Mary Lascelles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 161

<sup>79</sup> M. Martin, *A Late Voyage to St. Kilda, the remotest of all the Hebrides or western isles of Scotland* (London, 1698), p. xi

market for domestic tourism. By the time of *Waverley's* publication, the arduous and potentially dangerous expedition it recalls had been transformed into leisurely journey undertaken by tourists rather than explorers.

In the later decades of the eighteenth century publishers met the demands of this readership by producing guidebooks like *The Traveller's Guide or, a Topographical Description of Scotland* (1798), *Scotland Delineated* (1799) and *A Traveller's Guide to Loch Lomond and its Environs* (1792), which provided maps, directions, lists of landmarks and recommendations as to the most scenic spots. In his discussion of the development of Highland tourism, Peter Womack has drawn a distinction between 'travelling' which is akin to 'reading works of history or agronomy' with the advantage that 'one is seeing the antiquities, fields, paintings, for oneself' and the 'holiday', which is not an 'inquiry into the world, but a playful refusal of it'.<sup>80</sup> Though this division articulates something of what is at stake in the opening up of Britain's remoter regions to a broader portion of the population, it fails to allow for the possibility that while 'holiday-makers' may not have actually partaken in the kinds of 'information' gathering activities Womack associates with travel, this did not stop them from imagining their trip in precisely these terms. The appeal of the Highlands and Islands to English visitors was not that of the leisure offered by the Georgian resort towns of Bath or Brighton, rather it lay with the strange customs, antiquated manners and foreign tongue of a remote people—the appreciation of which came close to a kind of proto-anthropological observation. In addition to the publication of new guidebooks, the demand for practical information was also met by the re-circulation of travel narratives like Thomas Pennant's *A Tour of Scotland and a Voyage to the Hebrides* (1776) and Samuel Johnson's *A Journey to the Western Isles* (1775). Most popular was Martin Martin's *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland circa 1695*: the first edition of which appeared in 1707 before being re-published in 1716, reproduced in John Pinkerton's *A General Collection of the best and more interesting voyages and travels in all parts of the world* in 1809 and again in *Miscellanea Scotia* in 1819.<sup>81</sup> To adopt a phrase from Johnson, these texts prepared the reader and traveler for the possibility of

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<sup>80</sup> Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London: Macmillan, 1989) pp. 150

<sup>81</sup> Martin Martin, who died in 1719, was a native of Skye and Gaelic speaker, employed largely as a tacksman for the small settlement of Floigarry, educated at Edinburgh University and Leiden University in the Netherlands. Lewis Spence provides a brief account of Martin's life in, *Second Sight: Its History and Origins* (London: Rider and Company, 1951)

seeing, not ‘paradise’ but simply ‘something different from what we are accustomed to see’<sup>82</sup>.

A native of the Western Isles and a Gaelic speaker, Martin’s account of his travels through the Outer Hebrides composed a popular and indispensable guide to Highland society, agricultural practices, living conditions, religious affiliations and manners. Further, in a lengthy chapter devoted to the topic the author established himself as an authority on Scottish second sight, and this open-minded appreciation of the phenomenon became a key point of reference for later studies. Describing it as ‘a singular Faculty of Seeing an otherwise invisible Object, without any previous Means used by the Person that sees it for that end’, Martin emphasises the physicality of the visionary experience, ‘at the sight of a Vision, the Eye-lids of the Person are erected, and the Eyes continue flaring until the Object vanish’; the nature of such visions, ‘the Seer knows neither the Object, Time, nor Place of a Vision before it appears; and the same Object is often seen by different Persons, living at considerable distance from one another’; its presence within non-humans, ‘horses and cows see the *Second Sight*’ and provides several authenticated instances to support his claims.<sup>83</sup> Most interesting is the suggestion that this supernatural vision may allow the seer to negotiate geographical distance. Recalling its interaction with his own movement across the isles, Martin avows that ‘I have been seen thus my self by Seers of both Sexes at some hundred miles distance; some that saw me in this manner, had never seen me personally, and it happened according to their Visions, without any previous design of mine to go to those Places, my coming there being purely accidental’.<sup>84</sup> Imagined as a kind of communication network between geographically distant sites, this special foreknowledge becomes tied to the workings of the travel narrative itself, providing an uncanny continuity from place to place. In another popular travelogue, Thomas Pennant similarly describes ‘a most convenient form of second sight, possessed by a gentleman of a neighbouring isle, who foresees all visitors, so has time to prepare accordingly’.<sup>85</sup> For Martin, the tradition also serves to bind remote Hebridean communities to one another: while the ‘Inhabitants of many of these Isles,

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<sup>82</sup> Samuel Johnson quoted in Peter Levi intro. *A Journey to the Western Isles and The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 19

<sup>83</sup> Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, p. 296, 298, 305

<sup>84</sup> *A Description of the Western Isles* p. 303

<sup>85</sup> Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland*, p. 14. Johnson and Boswell also carried a copy of this travelogue on their journey through the Highlands and Islands, see Nicholas Hudson, *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 155-6

never had the least contact by Word or Writing' and are separated by 'forty or fifty Leagues' they find commonality in shared visionary experiences.<sup>86</sup>

As a young boy Samuel Johnson received a copy of a *Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* from his father, and when in 1773 he embarked upon a similar tour of the Hebrides with his Scottish biographer James Boswell, he carried it with him.<sup>87</sup> Undertaken over the course of three months, the journey took in cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as the Highlands and Western Isles. Paying little attention to the intellectual and economic transformations occurring in the Lowlands, the pair attended primarily to the rapid social transitions being enacted in the recently subdued north; the wild spaces of the Western Isles offering the opportunity to expand upon the empirical knowledge of mankind, or as Boswell recorded in his diary during the trip, his companion was 'pleased to say, 'You and I do not talk from books''.<sup>88</sup> As critics then and now have noted, Johnson's inquiry composed something akin to an imperial ethnography based upon a network of deeply held anti-Scottish sentiments. As John Knox argued in 1786, he had set out 'under incurable impressions of a national prejudice, a religious prejudice and a literary prejudice'.<sup>89</sup> Most stark among the hierarchies maintain through *A Journey to the Western Isles* is that between written and oral culture, so that the Highland peasant can have no conception of his history as without records 'what is once out of sight is lost for ever'.<sup>90</sup>

With this in mind, it is perhaps strange that Johnson appeared quite willing to countenance the possibility that among these same peasants exists the power of special foresight. Despite being assured that, 'it is the common talk of the Lowland Scots, that the notion of 'second sight' is wearing away with other superstitions, and that its reality is no longer supposed but by the grossest people', he remained confident of the interest still aroused by the topic south of the border: 'We should have little claim to the praise of curiosity, if we had not endeavoured with particular attention to examine the question of second sight [...] it is desirable that the truth

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<sup>86</sup> *A Description of the Western Isles*, p. 312

<sup>87</sup> See Thomas Jemiely, 'Samuel Johnson, the Second Sight, and his Sources', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 14:3 (1974) and Thomas M. Curely, *Samuel Johnson and the Age of Travel* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2009)

<sup>88</sup> James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (1785), (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807), p. 395

<sup>89</sup> John Knox quoted in Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape, Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain 1760-1800* (California: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 198

<sup>90</sup> *A Journey to the Western Isles*, p. 89

should be established or fallacy detected'.<sup>91</sup> Having described the 'manners' of the 'mountaineers' he has thus far encountered as 'commonly savage', Johnson proposes that rather than being only the result of an inherited predisposition 'derived from their ancestors' this unrefined comportment is also the consequence of geographical, political and cultural circumstance, it is 'produced by their situation'. Thus, just as the martial nature of the Highlander is rendered explicable by a long history of intra-clan warfare, so too is the seemingly 'useless' faculty of 'seeing things out of sight' understandable in an 'local' context.<sup>92</sup> Despite the distanced and measured tone adopted in his discussion of this 'faculty for seeing things out of sight'—which is acknowledged as a 'breach of the common order of things'—Johnson nonetheless opened himself up to charges of credulity. An article from 1808 is particularly telling: the author reflects that 'Few of Dr. Johnson's apparent eccentricities have excited so much ridicule as his defence of Scottish Second-Sight; a gift that has always been considered by every well-bred Englishman as a proof only of the ignorance and vanity of the Caledonians'.<sup>93</sup> Crossing the Highland Line and forcing an encounter with that 'peculiar and discriminative form of life', constitutes a betrayal of the solid rationalism of his English heritage.<sup>94</sup>

The second sight tradition also embodies its own geographical co-ordinates. As well as being strongly tied to a sense of place—even when the seer is not named recorded instances always name the location in which the vision is said to have taken place—the power also comes to signify a certain topographical tension: that of a borderland between wild and civilised locales where the rational and the supernatural are drawn into an encounter with one another. In an early tract on second sight, circulated in manuscript form from the end of the seventeenth century and published by Walter Scott in 1815, this boundary is conceived of as a very real one dividing the human world from the realm of the faeries. A self-taught Gaelic speaker and Minister of Aberfoyle, Robert Kirk was enlisted to help with Robert Boyle's evangelising translation of the Bible into Gaelic, for distribution among the un-Reformed Highland population. What this seemingly Christian orthodoxy belied, however, was Kirk's commitment to the absolute reality of another world of faeries, brownies and elves existing in parallel to our own. As Mariana Warner has it in an introduction to a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 248

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 95 and 252

<sup>93</sup> *The Satirist*, 3 (December 1808), 483-491

<sup>94</sup> *A Journey to the Western Isles*, p. 256



recent edition of his treatise, Kirk fuses ‘two hitherto incommensurate spiritual universes: the fairyland of the Celtic tradition, and the Neo-Platonist world of forms’.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* asserts a uniquely co-dependant relation between those bestowed with the second sight and this ‘subterranean’ people. Second-sighted individuals, who are for the most part male, possess privileged access to this other ‘kingdom’. Faeries ‘are clearly seen by these men of the second sight to eat at funerall banquets, hence men of the Scottish-Irish will not tast meat at those meetings, least they have communion with, or be poysoned [sic] by them’, and it is they alone who can perceive during the twilight hours their ‘light changeable bodies’.<sup>96</sup> As an emissary to this occulted realm, the ‘*tabbaisder*’ or seer functions as a kind of ethnographic observer, describing the social structure, customs and habits of this twin world.

Established in *The Secret Commonwealth* is a Neo-Platonist conception, common to that pursued by other seventeenth-century thinkers like Thomas More, of a world infused by innumerable ‘astral’ bodies and ‘intelligent studious spirits’.<sup>97</sup> While this particular philosophical vision can be traced through various eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sites, our specific concern here is with how its particular application in Kirk’s treatise helped to produce Scotland as a bleak, dangerous, magical and ancient landscape. This landscape functioned, moreover, as both a storehouse of supernatural agency and an inspiration for supernatural belief. In his *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (2008), Jason M. Harris describes the ‘metaphysical contact zone’ exploited by folk tales, which situates supernatural ‘intrusions’ at geographical/psychological boundaries.<sup>98</sup> Applying this to the work of James Hogg, Harris proposes that in his *Three Perils of Man: War, Women and Witchcraft* (1822) the author identifies the Scottish Borders as zone existing not only between two nations, but also between ‘otherworldly and worldly’ forces.<sup>99</sup> Extended to ‘The Two Drovers’, which actualises this national tension in the same

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<sup>95</sup> Marina Warner introduction to Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth, An Essay on the Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and for the Most Part) Invisible People, Heretofore Going Under the Name of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* [1691] (New York: New York Review Books, 2007), p. xvii

<sup>96</sup> Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth, An Essay on the Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and for the Most Part) Invisible People, Heretofore Going Under the Name of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* [1691], with comment by Andrew Lang and an introduction by R.B. Cunninghame Graham (Enemas MacKay: Stirling, 1893), p. 64 and 60

<sup>97</sup> *The Secret Commonwealth* (1893), p. 60

<sup>98</sup> Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 103

<sup>99</sup> Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, p. 115

geographical locale, it is arguable that Highland second sight is employed here to signify a system of ‘folk metaphysics’—or ‘folkloric assumptions about how the supernatural engages the material world’—incommensurable with the southern drover’s understanding of ‘reality’.<sup>100</sup> Originating in what Scott describes elsewhere as the ‘twilight regions of the superstitious disquisitions’, the prophetic narrative that compels tragedy retains its terrible agency despite the Englishman’s disbelief in such ‘superstitions’.<sup>101</sup>

This is not to suggest that Scott was himself convinced by the reality of second sight, as we have already seen he was more inclined to consign it to a primitive past, but rather that he recognises and exploits it as an essential creative resource. Thinking once more of the ‘wild feelings’ that lead Edward Waverley deeper into the Jacobite north and the ‘sober reason’ that prompts his journey back south, it is clear that Scott recognises and exploits the Highland Line as a psychological border dividing the imaginative unrealities from rationalist realities.<sup>102</sup> The lesson *Waverley* teaches its readers then, as James Buzard suggests, is ‘not that romance must be rejected or outlived in favour of ‘reality’ but that it must strictly sequestered as culture’, in which the supernatural comes to signify a feudal, Catholic and superstitious past opposed to the present occupied by the reader.<sup>103</sup> Considering how bound his novels are to a ‘picturesque and romantic country’, a feature that made them particularly ‘well suited to the needs of tourists’, it is also the case that Scott worked to *geographically* situate ‘romance’ in an increasingly spectral Highland landscape.<sup>104</sup>

Important then is the symbiotic relation between the survival of ancient customs or beliefs out of step with more ‘civilised’ regions, and the topographical characteristics of the Highlands and Islands. This confluence of mind and landscape is particularly notable in writings on the phenomenon of second sight. In an attempt to explain the prevalence of this ‘superstition’ in isolated areas James Beattie, in his *Essays on Poetry and Music* (1779), describes a ‘lonely region, full of echoes, and rocks and caverns’ the ‘grotesque and ghastly’ appearance of which can not help but impact

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<sup>100</sup> Harris, p. viii

<sup>101</sup> *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, p. 33

<sup>102</sup> *Waverley*, p. 75

<sup>103</sup> James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the to ‘Culture’ 1800-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 51

<sup>104</sup> *Waverley*, p. 24 and Katherine Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland, 1770-1914*, p. 80

upon ‘persons of lively imagination’.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, on a tour through the Highlands in 1780 Jacob Pattison, having heard several stories of second sight concluded that, ‘In the Western Isles it is said to much more believed and indeed it is credited in proportion to distance, or obscurity of the place, and the consequent ignorance of the people’.<sup>106</sup> While in J.S Forsythe’s *Demonologia; or, Natural Knowledge Revealed, Being an Expose of Ancient and Modern Superstitions* (1827), the author makes clear that is because of their ‘obscurity of the place’ that the inhabitants of northern regions retain a belief in the operation of supernatural forces. Where in England’s great towns ‘the hurry and dissipation that attend the opulent, and the little leisure the poor have’ do not allow space for the supernatural, in the ‘Highlands of Scotland, where they live solitary, and have little to do, or see done, and consequently, comparatively have but few ideas’, so that ‘when any thing of the above nature occurs, they have the leisure to brood over it, and cannot get it banished from their minds’.<sup>107</sup> As well as being generally more inclined to credulity—the author assures his reader that ‘no people on earth are more addicted’ to the ‘belief in spirits and apparitions’—the topography of the landscape itself contributes greatly to this peculiar disposition. The ‘whistling of wind among the heath, rocks and caverns, a loose fragment of a rock falling from its top, and in its course downward bringing a hundred more down with it, so that it appears like the wreck of nature’, ensure that even the most enlightened fall prey to superstition’.<sup>108</sup> Established in these accounts is a hallucinatory model, whereby a ghostly landscape of mountains, glens and towering crags, acting in collusion with the innate credulity of its inhabitants, produces a condition of the mind in which superstitious belief can flourish.

As has been demonstrated by a wealth of eighteenth-century scholarship, the Romantic-turn in literature, poetry, art and philosophy promoted a new mode of engagement with the natural world. Ian Whyte credits it with having explored a unique ‘mysticism of place’, while Sasha Handley describes ‘the intimate and sometimes subconscious connections drawn between the idea of ghosts and eighteenth-century landscapes’, and John Hedley charts the transmutation of values attributed to the landscape itself: so that while Samuel Johnson finds the Highlands

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<sup>105</sup> James Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1779), p. 169

<sup>106</sup> Jacob Pattison, ‘A Tour through part of the Highlands of Scotland in 1780’, National Library of Scotland, MS. 6322, p. 24

<sup>107</sup> J.S Forsythe, *Demonologia; or, Natural Knowledge Revealed, Being an Expose of Ancient and Modern Superstitions* (London: A. K. Newman and Co, 1833), p. 199

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* p. 199

marred by 'hopeless sterility' in 1775, William Gilpin compliments the same rugged topography as being 'entirely in a state of nature' in 1794.<sup>109</sup> The Romantic engagement with landscape, particularly in the picturesque mode, has been routinely theorised as a process of aesthetic detachment whereby the viewer removes himself from the concrete particularities of place 'in a nostalgia-tinged attempt' to 'recapture the freedom, simplicity, and intensity of experience associated with childhood and past times'.<sup>110</sup> Accounts such as those offered by Penny Fielding unite this subjectivisation with late-eighteenth century tourism in promoting 'a single landscape (misty, mountainous, Highland)' to stand for a homogenous Scotland, which was 'repackaged and sold' to a Victorian audience.<sup>111</sup>

This position is certainly supported by the mid-nineteenth century explorer Fanny Parks, who was able to remark on her journey through the Himalayas that, 'I hear we are going to be carried back in the imagination to Highlands of Scotland. I have never been there: *n'importe*, I can fancy as well as others'.<sup>112</sup> In her study of the development of mass tourism at the turn of the nineteenth century Katherine Grenier argues that the experience of visiting Scotland was one increasingly mediated through fiction. The short stories and historical novels of Walter Scott are singled out here as particularly strong examples of a more general transformation of literature into practical guides for the uninitiated visitor. As Grenier demonstrates, guidebooks 'provided sightseers with the Scott associations of any given sight or attraction, often quoted the relevant poem or description so as to evoke the proper atmosphere, and assured readers that Scott's portrayals were accurate and true to life'.<sup>113</sup> Furnished with pocket-sized 'Tourist Editions' of poems like *The Lady of the Lake* or *The Lord of the Isles*, English travellers were taught to view sites like Loch Katrine or Ardtornish Castle through the prism of historical fiction.<sup>114</sup> This is not to suggest that visitors mistook fiction for fact, but rather that their investment in Scotland's landscape,

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<sup>109</sup>Ian D. Whyte, *Landscape and History Since 1500* (London: Reaktion, 2002), p. 120, Sasha Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Beliefs and Ghost Stories in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), p. 178 and John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 507

<sup>110</sup> John Glendening, *The High Road: Romantic Tourism, Scotland, and Literature, 1720-1820* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 7

<sup>111</sup> Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 187

<sup>112</sup> Fanny Parks, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* 2 Vols. (London: Richardson, 1850), vol. 1 p. 63

<sup>113</sup> Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland*, p. 81

<sup>114</sup>See also David Inglis and Mary Holmes, 'Highland and Other Haunts: Ghosts in Scottish Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* 30.1(2003) 57-61

customs and history was one understood through the new realities, images and histories produced by novelists, poets and artists.

Considering the constant re-iteration of second sight as a form of vision intimately connected to the mountainous terrain and windswept moors of the Highlands, it is not unreasonable to propose that consistent with an altered perception of the landscape itself, came an evolution in the meanings ascribed to this uncanny faculty. In her *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland 1803* (1874), Dorothy Wordsworth recounts her party's encounter with a Gaelic speaking boy, who her brother describes as a 'text' containing 'the whole history of the Highlander's life—his melancholy, his simplicity, his poverty, his superstitions, and above all, that visionariness which results from a communion with the otherworldliness of nature'.<sup>115</sup> In this startling image, by which the identity of a nation is glimpsed in the fleeting image of plaid-clad youth, the author lights upon a reading of second sight that came to dominate in the intellectual culture of European Romanticism. While as we have seen, the identification of Highland geographies as the cause of strange visual experiences is a fairly typical feature of writing on second sight, the privileging of such visions as sites of poetic inspiration arrives only with the Romantic movement. Where antiquarian and scientific literatures of second sight treat the phenomenon as an object of study, always distinct from their own experience, Romanticism incorporated it into theories of creativity, imagination and the soul. In his 1812 notebook, for instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had joined the Wordsworths on their 1803 tour, speaks of his own 'second sight' that permits him to see a vision, that is 'not as one given to me by any other Being but as an act of my own Spirit'.<sup>116</sup> Written into a developing philosophy of the imagination, second sight retained an almost mystical connection to the Highland landscape, ancient custom and local mythologies, yet it also took on the appearance of a poetic resource—accessible through the exploration of altered states of consciousness.

### 1.3 VISIONARY IMAGINATION

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<sup>115</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth in *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland 1803* (London: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), p. 43

<sup>116</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebook 1812* (4166), quoted in Gregory Leadbetter, *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (London: Palgrave, 2011), p. 43

In *Redgauntlet* (1824), a novel often cited as Walter Scott's most clearly autobiographical work, the lawyer protagonist Alain Fairford writes to his young charge Darsie Latimer: 'Didst ever see what artists call a Claude Lorraine glass, which spreads its own particular hue over the whole landscape you see through it?'.<sup>117</sup> The optical instrument described here, composed of a series of coloured filters mounted on a fan-like device, allowed the viewer to cast a given scene in new and changing shades. In Onno Oerlemans' terms, the popularity of such optical instruments in the late eighteenth century exemplifies the tendency of the age to produce the landscape as an aesthetic artefact. Using the 'Claude Glass' as his example, Oerlemans describes 'a tinted convex mirror which could produce from nearly any landscape as instant approximation of a heavily varnished painting'.<sup>118</sup> Along similar lines, in *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818* (1995), Elizabeth A. Bohl's proposes that this 'quaint device catered to scenic tourism's tendency to detach the viewer from scene, and the scene, neatly packaged, from its surrounding environment'.<sup>119</sup> Yet this 'tourist gadget', famously taken by William and Dorothy Wordsworth on their tour through Scotland with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1803, came imbued with a distinctly supernatural history. Similar to the black mirror used by Dr. John Dee, physician and astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I, for catoptromancy, the Claude Glass retained an occult resonance: the quasi-metaphysical miniaturisation of the landscape bringing forth a reputedly unearthly and sublime vision. As when Coleridge writes of binding nature and poetry together, 'In the country, all around us smile Good and Beauty—and the Images of this divine *kalokagathon* are miniaturised on the mind of the beholder, as a Landscape on a Convex Mirror', this device offered a mode of vision more tightly bound to the workings of the imagination.<sup>120</sup> In a recent monograph on the Claude Glass, Arnaud Maillet describes Coleridge's use of it as evincing 'an imperceptible slippage that transforms the Claude mirror, a strictly optical instrument, into a purely metaphoric and even symbolic instrument. These two

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<sup>117</sup> Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet* (1824) (New York: Columbia Press, 1997) p. 33 cited in Arnaud Maillet, *The Claude Glass: Use and Meaning of the Black Mirror in Western Art*, trans. Jeff Ford (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 32

<sup>118</sup> Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (London and Toronto: University Press, 2000), p. 158

<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohl, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 94-5

<sup>120</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge to George Dyer, March 10, 1795, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford University Press, 1956) I, p. 154

aspects delimit a battlefield'.<sup>121</sup> Thinking about this in relation to Samuel Johnson's seemingly simple but deceptively complex description of second sight as, 'an impression made either by the mind upon the eye, or by the eye upon the mind by which things distant or future are perceived, and seen as if they were present', the closing section of this chapter will attend more closely to the complex relations between second sight, optical illusion and the poetic imagination.<sup>122</sup>

In *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, Robert Kirk describes second sight as 'the habit in some, descended from their ancestors, and acquired as an artificial improvement of their natural sight in others; Resembling in their own kind, the usual artificial helps of Optic Glasses (prospectives, Telescopes, and Microscopes)'.<sup>123</sup> Plucked from the realm of the miraculous and the diabolical, Kirk compares this special visionary power to the kinds of enhanced perspective enabled by scientific devices, before speculating that a proper investigation of this capability might prove a discovery comparable to navigation, printing or gunnery.<sup>124</sup> Written at the close of the seventeenth century, this treatise engaged in a boundary dispute concerning the nature and meaning of perceptible reality. As we have seen, the author's friends in the Royal Society of London took up second sight as a bulwark against growing religious scepticism and the threats posed by materialist philosophies. By compiling evidence of the seemingly metaphysical and collecting testimony of uncanny experience, theistically minded scientists argued for the empirical reality of the supernatural. This was a project undertaken in the hope of prompting their materialist counterparts into a fuller realisation of the scope of scientific observation: as Henry More wrote approvingly of Joseph Glanvill's demonology, it 'may rub up and awaken their benumbed and lethargick [sic] minds into a suspicion at least, it not assurance that there are other intelligent beings besides those clad in heavy earth or clay'.<sup>125</sup> In pursuing a comparison with modern optical devices, Kirk asserts the

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<sup>121</sup> Arnaud Maillet, *The Claude Glass: Use and Meaning of the Black Mirror in Western Art*, pp. 147-148. Maillet's monograph charts the use of the Claude Glass in painting and sculpture from the eighteenth century onwards, and argues that the history of this particular optical device is demonstrative of our anxiety regarding mirrors, opacity, reflections and their potential distortions

<sup>122</sup> Johnson, Samuel, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775), p. 309

<sup>123</sup> *The Secret Commonwealth*, p. 94

<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Massachusetts: MIT, 1992) and Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) for later examples of the interconnectivities between emerging optical technologies and the construction of human vision

<sup>125</sup> Henry More to Joseph Glanvill, cited in *Saducismus Triumphatus: Or, Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions*, p. 16

objective reality of the faerie realm observed by the second-sighted. Just as the tiny particles made visible by the ‘Microscope’ remain invisible to the naked eye, so to are the ‘light changeable bodies’ of the *siths* only perceptible to those in possession of superadded visionary capability—that some elements of the world are not visible to all people at all times does not make them, Kirk asserts, any less ‘real’.<sup>126</sup>

As beings of a ‘middle nature betwixt man and angel’, faeries composed part of Neo-Platonic world peopled with not only by humans, but a myriad of other forms empowered to guide or malevolently manipulate the eye. Though concerned with an earlier period than the one covered by this chapter, Stuart Clark’s discussion of models of vision during the Renaissance is illuminating. He writes that, ‘objects in the world gave off resemblances or replicas of themselves (*species*) which then travelled to the eyes’ and that broadly speaking ‘the mind had direct access to accurate pictures of the world; the world was what it appeared visually to be’.<sup>127</sup> At any stage of this cognitive process, however, diabolic or angelic agencies could intervene to manipulate either perceived objects or interior perceptions. The terminology unearthed in Clark’s study is taken up in a later inquiry into second sight, John Frazer’s *Deuteroscopia* (1707), by which point it has undergone a telling etymological shift. Adopting the language of *species*, Frazer begins by describing how when the ‘Brain is in a Serene temper’ these ‘Species’ keep ‘their Rank and File, as they were received’: in other words, ‘normal’ vision maintains uniformity between exterior action and interior perception. Yet when the ‘Brain is filled with gross and flatuous Vapours’, then ‘Spirits’ and ‘Humours’ and ‘Ideas’ become ‘multiplied as an Army in the mist: sometimes magnified; sometimes misplaced; sometimes confounded by other Species of different objects’.<sup>128</sup> The thesis pursued by *Deuteroscopia* provides a useful bridge into an increasingly psychologised understanding of perception. For though Frazer does not suggest that the ‘Species’ perceived by the second-sighted are entirely products of the imagination, he does propose that a ‘natural constitution and temperament’ particular to the seer permits him to observe what remains invisible to most. This slight shift from exterior to interior action was, as the eighteenth century progressed, realised as part of larger

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<sup>126</sup> *The Secret Commonwealth* p. 45

<sup>127</sup> Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 2-3. See also Walter Simon Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel eds., *Early Modern Eyes* (Leiden: Koninklijke, 2010)

<sup>128</sup> Frazer, *Deuteroscopia*, p. 9



relocation of uncanny happenings from an objectively structured outside world, to the realms of subjective mental experience.<sup>129</sup>

The primary instigators of this new visual regime have been routinely identified as the Protestant Reformation and the mechanist philosophy pursued by René Descartes; the former having done away with the doctrine of purgatory and with it the ghosts of the departed, while the second's pursuit of natural law dispensed with the notion of divine intervention. As Keith Thomas has argued:

The notion that the universe was subject to immutable natural laws killed the concept of miracles, weakened the belief in the physical efficacy of prayer, and diminished faith in the possibility of direct divine inspiration. The Cartesian concept of matter relegated spirits, whether good or bad, to the purely mental world; conjuration ceased to be a meaningful ambition<sup>130</sup>

Recent scholarship has attempted to moderate this position by arguing that the top down approach to this history adopted by Thomas has tended to overlook the survival of belief and strategies of subversion that attended upon this upheaval in British society.<sup>131</sup> Though there is not the space here to consider fully the role played by ghost-seeing or visionary experience in this complex cultural landscape, it remains necessary to note that the revolutionary epistemologies Thomas charges with having precipitated decline in magical belief—namely those of mechanistic philosophy—also served as the impetus for seventeenth-century investigations into second sight. That is to say, the scientific empiricism pursued by figures like Robert Boyle did not do away with interest in the supernatural, but it did re-frame the conditions under which it was judged. As Sasha Handley writes of a later context, the 'Enlightenment obsession with unseen and invisible powers in fact ensured that ghost stories could sometimes command widespread fascination, since they had the potential to reveal hidden secrets about the orders of God and nature'.<sup>132</sup> The implication being that

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<sup>129</sup> Jo Bath and John Newton, 'Sensible Proof of Spirits': Ghost Belief during the Later Seventeenth Century', *Folklore* 117: 1 (2006), 1-14

<sup>130</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* [1971] (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 643

<sup>131</sup> In *The Reformation of Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (2011), Alexandra Walsham argues that the theological and liturgical transformations enacted by the Protestant Reformation altered but did necessarily undo the spiritual and transcendental properties awarded to topographical features like mountains and rivers or to ancient monuments

<sup>132</sup> Sasha Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Beliefs and Ghost Stories in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007)

new theories of vision—empiricist, mechanist, materialist—produced their own ghosts.

In a typically measured assessment of the question, Stuart Clarke proposes that as the visible world came to be characterised, from at least the middle of the sixteenth century, by ‘visible signs of indeterminate meaning’ and these were increasingly ‘marked by profound disagreement’.<sup>133</sup> In the first decades of the nineteenth century, this ‘disagreement’ played out across a flurry of polemics on the subject of apparitions.<sup>134</sup> Treatises such as Samuel Hibbert’s *Philosophy of Apparitions* (1825) and Joseph Taylor’s *Apparitions; or, The Mystery of Ghosts, Hobgoblins, and Haunted Houses, Developed* (1815), sought to debunk superstitions by situating supernatural experience in the deluded eye or misled mind of the beholder. In an *Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (1813), for example, John Ferriar proposes that the seeing of apparitions is explainable as a ‘renewal of external impressions’ through which a visual memory is re-animated and appears once more before the eyes as if new.<sup>135</sup> This theory is not entirely removed from the *taibhs* associated with the second sight tradition. The *tainbh* being the spectral double of a person presented to the eyes of the seer: so that when a still-living neighbour appears wrapped in their winding sheet, this is acknowledged as a ghostly reflection forecasting death rather than an apparition of one returned.<sup>136</sup> The strengthening medical model of hallucination towards which Ferriar’s text contributes, recast such forms of visionary experience as evidential only of an individual confusion of perception and not as mechanisms of preternatural foreknowledge. This pathological reading informs the geologist John Macculloch’s description of second sight in 1819 as being an ability now confined only to the ‘doting old woman or the hypochondriacal tailor’, and similarly prompts Robert MacNish almost twenty years later to propose that ‘What is called the Second Sight, originated, in most cases, from spectral illusion; and the seers of whom we so often read, were merely individuals visited by these phantoms’.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Clarke, p. 2

<sup>134</sup> See Owen Davies *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke, 2007)

<sup>135</sup> John Ferriar, *Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (London, 1813), p. 95

<sup>136</sup> See Lewis Spence, *Second Sight: Its History and Origins*, Lewis Spence (London: Rider and Company, 1951)

<sup>137</sup> John Macculloch, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland including the Isle of Man; comprising an account of their geological structure; with Remarks on their agriculture, scenery, and antiquities* 3 vols. (London: J. Moyes, 1819), vol. 2 p. 33 and Robert MacNish, *The Philosophy of Sleep* (W.R. M’Phun: Glasgow, 1838), p. 261

In the closing passage of his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), Scott avows that given that ‘most ordinary mechanic has learning sufficient to laugh at the figments which in former times were believed by persons far advanced in the deepest knowledge of the age’, perhaps ‘the present fashion of the world seems to be ill suited for studies of this fantastic nature’.<sup>138</sup> This oddly self-effacing conclusion to a collection of superstitions and legendary ghosts composed from the author’s own library captures the ambiguous position occupied by the supernatural in early-nineteenth century culture. An article published in 1825 is similarly assured that, ‘as the world is getting more enlightened and knowledge becoming more generally defused among the lower classes the belief in spirits is evaporating’.<sup>139</sup> Though Scott attributes the seeing of ghosts to the effects of some ‘lively dream, a waking reverie, the excitation of a powerful imagination, or the misrepresentation of a diseased organ of sight’, after which ‘shades of mental aberration have afterwards occurred’, there remains a note of disappointment in his suspicion that ‘fashion’ and ‘learning’ might have outgrown the supernatural.<sup>140</sup> *Letters on Demonology* then, in common with the heavily annotated *Waverley Novels*, sees its author negotiate a space for the uncanny or the folkloric at an historical remove from the reader: the ‘grosser faults of our ancestors’ being now ‘out of date’.<sup>141</sup> The force of this rationalising retrospect is complicated by Scott’s acknowledgement of the psychological universality of supernatural experience: ‘Who shall doubt that imagination, favoured by circumstances, has the power to summon up to the organ of sight, spectres which only exist in the mind of those by whom their apparition seems to be witnessed?’<sup>142</sup> This seeming contradiction, whereby the supernatural is threatened with extinction in the same moment that its absolute universality is assured, it perhaps best accounted for in terms of what Terry Castle has described as the ‘invention of the uncanny’. In *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (1995) Castle proposes that the dismissal of the supernatural as the result of a disordered sensorium did little to diminish the affectivity of that experience. Rather it resulted in

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<sup>138</sup> Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft, addressed to J. G. Lockhart Esq.* (1830) p. 389

<sup>139</sup> *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* (June 1825), 386-390 (386)

<sup>140</sup> *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, pp. 344-5

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 390

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6

the 'spectralization' of inner space: the rationalisation of spectres and spirits as psychological aberrations produced the mind itself as haunted.<sup>143</sup>

One of the writers best attuned to the gothic potentials of this 'spectralization' was Scott's friend, collaborator and Border compatriot, James Hogg. The narrative possibilities of the haunted mind are most fully explored in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), a story whose dualistic and conflicting narration binds the language of superstition to that of psychology. The story concerns the various misdeeds of Robert Wringham, a fanatical Calvinist convinced of his pre-election and lured to commit heinous acts by his diabolical double Gil Martin, as told first by a sceptical narrator and then by Robert himself. The motif of the double, that duplicitous and eerie 'other' self most obviously encodes the Romantic thematics of multiplicity and uncanny sympathy.<sup>144</sup> Yet in line with Ian Duncan's characterisation of Hogg's fictions as typically affirming 'the potency of rural culture [as] outside terms of explanation, a final, opaque otherness', his use of the double also calls up the tradition of Highland second sight.<sup>145</sup> In *The Secret Commonwealth*, Kirk recounts how, 'Some men of the exalted sight [...] have told me they have seen at those meetings a double-man, or the shape of the same man in two places, that is, a Superterranean and a Subterranean Inhabitant perfectly resembling one another in all points'.<sup>146</sup> These otherworldly doubles appear in the visions of the seer, acting out phantasmal scenes and prophetic pictures, shadowing the actions of the living. Often these spectral selves are fatal to the first self, as a story recounted by Martin Martin reveals: he recalls that a 'Woman in *Skie*, who frequently saw a Vision representing a Woman having a Shroud about her up to the middle but always appeared with her back towards her', eventually discovered a means to trick the spectre into revealing its identity, which 'soon after presented itself with its Face and Dress looking towards the Woman, and it proved to resemble her self in all points [...] she died a little time

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<sup>143</sup> Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 143-4

<sup>144</sup> The theme of the double also appears in Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet* (1824)

<sup>145</sup> Ian Duncan, 'The Upright Corpse: Hogg, National Literature and the Uncanny', *Studies in Hogg and His World* 5 (1994), 29-54 and see also P.D. Garside 'Hogg's *Confessions* and Scotland', *Studies in Hogg and His World* 12 (2001), 118-38

<sup>146</sup> *The Secret Commonwealth*, p. 80

after'.<sup>147</sup> Wringham's astonishment on 'perceiving that he was the same being as myself' is, in one sense, a revivification of second sight's uncanny potentials.<sup>148</sup>

In Karl Miller's reading of the literary uses of the double, he proposes that, 'the story of the modern double starts' when 'Mesmerists and Animal Magnetists went in for the experimental separation of the second self, and romantic writers went in for its cultural exploitation'.<sup>149</sup> Seemingly bound to Gil Martin, Wringham at one point queries what it may be to have 'two souls, which take possession of my bodily frame by turns, the one being all unconscious of what the other performs'.<sup>150</sup> The creative potentials of the *doppelgänger* serve as a bridge between poetic ideals and emerging mesmeric theories at turn of the nineteenth century. Privileging altered states of dreaming, reverie and trance as sites in which the human imagination is empowered to transcend the familiar and the commonplace, Romantics engaged with mesmerism as a means of illuminating the connectedness of mind and body, soul and nature.<sup>151</sup> Its appeal to writers like Coleridge lay in the evocation of unseen powers and connections unexplainable by physical laws: as Jenny Ford has written it 'posited the influence of psychological powers, particularly those of the imagination, and possessed a mysterious aspect which could not be matched by theories of association'.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, as A.J.L. Busst has described, it is at the intersection between the European literature of animal magnetism—texts such as Baron Dupotet's *An Introduction to the study of animal magnetism* (1838) and J. P. F. Deleuze's *The History of Animal Magnetism* (1813) are cited as key examples—and a wider Romantic movement, that the phenomenon of second sight it put to work in forming a new philosophy of the imagination. While Busst proposes that second sight was only taken up as 'a means of conferring respectability and solidity on [the magnetiser's] own theories', the engagement of German Idealists like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel with the history and mechanisms of the phenomenon, suggest deeper

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<sup>147</sup> *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, p. 311

<sup>148</sup> James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Written by Himself: with a detail of curious and traditionary facts and other evidence by the editor* (London: Longmans, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), p. 175

<sup>149</sup> Karl Miller, *The Double: Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 49

<sup>150</sup> Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 293

<sup>151</sup> Adam Crabtree, *Animal Magnetism, Early Hypnotism and Psychological Research 1766-1925* (New York: Krus International Publications, 1988) and Henri F. Ellenberger *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana Press, 1970)

<sup>152</sup> Jenny Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 101. See also Patricia Adair, *The Waking Dream: A Study of Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967) and Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

interest.<sup>153</sup> In comparable terms to Coleridge's explication of prophetic dreams as occurring when 'Perception and Imagination insinuate themselves and mix with forms of Recollection, till the Present appears to exactly correspond to the Past', Hegel conceived of second sight as a kind of sympathy between mind and environment: in which 'the intuitive soul oversteps the conditions of time and space; it beholds things remote, things long past, and things to come'.<sup>154</sup> Taken up in the work of figures such as F. W. J. Schelling and G.H. von Schubert, second sight is initiated into a psycho-poetic tradition in which, 'presentiments and prescriptions characteristic of the somnambulistic and related states, are intimations of a higher stage of being yet to come'.<sup>155</sup>

Writing in 1838, Baron Dupotet de Sennevoy, a leading French magnetist claimed to have solved an 'ancient' riddle: 'The somnambulic faculty of clairvoyance, or the power of seeing events passing at a distance, affords a solution to the mystery of what, in the north of Scotland, is called second sight'.<sup>156</sup> The following chapter will consider in more detail the roles performed by Scottish second sight in relation to animal magnetism in the mid-century. Here it is enough to observe that this superstition of the Highlands appears to have undergone a subtle transformation. Where once second sight constituted an object of the English-speaker's imagination—as topic for scientific or antiquarian inquiry, as well as a source of poetic inspiration—taken up by mesmerism, the visionary power resembles something closer to a philosophical system for describing and understanding the imagination itself. As we will see, though its interaction with European Romanticism in the early decades of the nineteenth century re-inscribes the phenomenon with certain common potentials, second sight remains understood at a point of tension between these universalising imperatives and the imageries, mythic histories and melancholic tragedy of the Highlands. Understood through a new language of mesmeric 'sensitivity' and magnetic 'receptivity', the prophetic powers now long associated with the inhabitants of mountainous regions and barren isles, remain largely exemplified by these romantic figures.

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<sup>153</sup> Busst, p. 164

<sup>154</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge quoted in Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, p 141

<sup>155</sup> G.H. von Schubert quoted in Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 142. See also Matt Ffytche, *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

<sup>156</sup> J. Dupotet de Sennevoy, *An Introduction to the study of animal magnetism* (London: Churchill, 1838), p. 275

## CONCLUSION

Underpinning interpretations of second sight in the Highlands, whether framed as travelogues, demonologies, scientific studies or literary explorations, is a concern with the limits of human vision and perception. In her *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland* (1811), Anne Grant describes the experience of second sight as a ‘shuddering impulse, a mental spasm that comes unsought, and often departs without leaving a trace’.<sup>157</sup> To be able to see such visions one must possess certain characteristics, as it is not ‘in the coarse and vulgar mind of apathy, that the imaginative faculty thus predominates’, rather it involves ‘the habits of deep meditation and sensitive and fantastic feeling, which nourish this creative faculty’.<sup>158</sup> Using the example of second sight as means by which to valorise the ‘sensitivity’ of the Highland people, Grant situates this foresight firmly within the imagination of the seer, which must ‘be awakened, and the mind stored with images, on which to feed in deep and silent musing, before these shadows can occupy’.<sup>159</sup> In this reading, the supernatural does not exist as an agency exterior to the individual and second sight is not produced by the machinations of faeries or spirits, rather it is the product of a uniquely creative interior feeding from its own imaginings: ‘visionary modes of thinking’ are simply part of the national character.<sup>160</sup> In respect of the assertion, made by James Engell, that ‘during the century and a half from 1660 to 1810, the Great Chain of Being enjoyed its last viable influence. The concept of the imagination replaced it’, the evolution of second sight within the same period must be considered as analogous to this development.<sup>161</sup>

In his *History of English Poetry* (1774-81) Thomas Warton voiced the perennial concern of his age that with the development of civilisation and vast material improvements, ‘we have lost a set of manners’ more attuned to the ‘purposes of poetry, than those which have been adopted in their place. We have parted with extravagances that are above propriety with incredibilities that are of more value than reality’.<sup>162</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century poets, writers and seekers of the

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<sup>157</sup> Anne Grant, *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland* 2 Vols (Edinburgh: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orne and Brown, 1811) vol. 1 pp. 34-35

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. p. 36

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>161</sup> James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 6

<sup>162</sup> Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, 3 vols. (London: J. Dodsley, 1774-81) vol. 2, pp. 462-3

supernatural looked to the Highlands to provide exactly this type of imaginative resource, the geographic embodiment of an earlier stage of human development replete with ancient customs, unfamiliar superstitions and antiquated manners. Despite the centrality of its landscape, language and traditions to Romanticism, imagining Scotland as an agent of creative production within this context has proved notoriously difficult. As Janet Sorensen, Leith Davis and Ian Duncan have suggested, ‘Scotland neither English nor foreign, stands for an inauthentic Romanticism, defined by a mystified—purely ideological commitment to history and folklore. Rather than being a site of Romantic productions, Scotland’s fate is to have become a Romantic object or commodity’.<sup>163</sup> For these historians ‘English’ Romanticism occupies a teleological place in the development of modern culture, whereas ‘Post-Enlightenment’ Scotland produces only pseudo-Romanticisms to stand in for its lost national history. Samuel Johnson’s renunciation of James Macpherson’s *The Works of Ossian* (1765), ‘If we know little of the ancient Highlanders, let us not fill the vacuity with Ossian’, having guided subsequent criticism of a seemingly fake, kitsch and ineffective Scottish Romanticism.<sup>164</sup>

Attendant on the construction of Highland history, myth and folk culture as a creative resource, was the knowledge that these acts of appropriation signalled the death of this ‘primitive’ arcadia. Respecting Michel de Certeau’s description of the historiographical operation—‘Writing speaks of the past only to inter it’—it is remarkable that attempts to observe and record Highland life, appear to almost ‘inter’ the present.<sup>165</sup> In a strange temporal negotiation accounts of this ‘ancient’ people present them both as exemplary of an earlier stage of cultural development and also on the brink of historical erasure. Writing in 1822, David Stewart is typical in his assertion that, ‘much of the romance and chivalry of the Highland character is gone. The voice of the bard has long been silent, and poetry, tradition and song, are vanishing away’.<sup>166</sup> Importantly this dying away is realised, like second sight, along both temporal and geographic lines, so that travel narratives often encode elegiac lamentations for imagined geographies or histories in decline. In his *Journey to the*

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<sup>163</sup> *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-2

<sup>164</sup> This formulation is evident in Jerome Christensen’s *Romanticism at the End of History* (2000) in which Scott, *The Edinburgh Review* and the Scottish Enlightenment are all called to stand as representations of official culture and authority.

<sup>165</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 101

<sup>166</sup> David Stewart, *Sketches of the Character, Manners and Present State of the Highlanders of Scotland; with Details of the Military Service of the Highland Regiments* vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1822), p. 121



*Western Isles* Johnson regrets, 'We came thither too late to see what we had expected, a people of peculiar appearance, and system of antiquated life'.<sup>167</sup> When Johnson and Boswell set out in 1773, the image of the Highlands as an antediluvian world transitioning to the modern was already a well-established trope of the travelogue. Precipitated by the breakdown of the clan system and waves of mass emigration, this sense of eroding tradition was also a product of the travel narrative itself. Freshly constructed military roadways and improved coach services made exploring the north easier, and post-Culloden policing made travel safer: mapped and subjected to new statistical surveys, the Highland landscape was one made increasingly familiar as the eighteenth century progressed. The second sight tradition is formulated by and read through the prism of this narrative of decay: in the same moment as it is identified as a discrete subject, its imminent dissolution is predicted, as if the reticent seer cannot be captured by the full glare of an inquisitive gaze.

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<sup>167</sup> *A Journey to the Western Isles*, p. 103

## CHAPTER TWO

### CLEAR SEEING AND SPIRIT BODIES: CATHERINE CROWE AND MESMERISM, 1830-1860

During a dinner party held in the Edinburgh home of the publisher Robert Chambers and his wife Anne in 1844, the conversation around the table turned to a recently published work of speculative natural history and to the mystery of its unnamed author.<sup>1</sup> The book in question was *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), a path-breaking account of the origins and projected course of creation, which precipitated a volley of scientific and religious debate through the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with the formation of the solar system and closing with utopian imaginings of future development, the text presented an ambitious synthesis of previously distinct scientific theories into a singular philosophical vision. Running through eleven editions by 1860, *Vestiges* familiarised a broadly composed reading public with the controversial theory of species transmutation, which applied developmental models favoured by astronomers and geologists to the vexed question of human evolution. Despite the text's placatory deference to a Creator, the theory of transmutation was widely interpreted as a blasphemous refutation of natural theology and the absolute limits dictated by revelation, and a flurry of denunciatory tracts followed the anonymous publication. Speculations over the authorship of this scandalous new work occupied daily newspapers, weekly journals and private correspondence alike, and before public interest waned several figures had emerged as popular candidates. These included the geologist Charles Lyell; the mathematician and daughter of Lord Byron, Ada Lovelace; the social theorist Harriet Martineau; the naturalist Charles Darwin; and even Prince Albert. Not surprising then, given the growing controversy, that the topic should arise and precipitate a 'brisk fire of conversation' in the home of an educated middle-class couple. What makes this incident worth retelling, however, is that as 'guesses were hazarded from all parts of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Chambers (1802-1871) along with his brother William Chambers (1800-1883) ran the highly successful weekly *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*. Largely directed towards the middle classes (in terms of price—three halfpence—and content), the journal advocated political economy, secular education and improvement. The brothers also published works of literature and reference titles of subjects ranging from biography and literary characters, to science, technology and history

<sup>2</sup> See John M. Lynch ed., *Vestiges and the Debates Before Darwin*, 7 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000), James A. Secord, 'Behind the Veil: Robert Chambers and *Vestiges*', in *History, Humanity and Evolution: Essays for John C. Greene*, ed. James R. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

the table', the book's author and host for the evening was busy exchanging 'furtive glances' across the dinner table with his co-conspirators, the journalist Alexander Ireland and the phrenologist Robert Cox.<sup>3</sup>

More than the 'delicious' and comedic occasion that Ireland would later recall, this dinner party offers a snapshot of a particularly rich moment in the cultural history of Scotland's capital. The Chambers and their guests were representative of the political liberalism and scientific preoccupations that defined the intellectual character of Edinburgh's Georgian New Town against the conservative institutions of the city's Old Town. Committed to a progressive view of human history inherited from their Enlightenment forerunners, these middle-class Whigs pursued reforms in education, penology, medicine and psychiatry. In the early decades of the nineteenth century the University of Edinburgh established itself as the key centre for medical training in Britain, one that operated without religious testing of Oxbridge and offered its students a grounding in both continental scholarship and clinical experience.<sup>4</sup> In its cosmological speculations and evolutionary imaginings *Vestiges* echoed the reformist spirit and liberal politics of the University, while simultaneously underlining ideological divisions within the city. Occurring only a year after the Disruption of 1843, which saw around 450 ministers break away from the moderate Church of Scotland to form the Free Church in protest at the perceived encroachment of the State on religious matters, the literary scandal precipitated by *Vestiges*' publication contributed to already strained relations among the capital's religious, educational and political institutions. Denounced from the pulpit and described by the editor of the evangelical weekly *Witness* as 'one of the most insidious pieces of practical atheism that has appeared in Britain during the present century', the theory of species transmutation was perceived as a blasphemous undermining of

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Ireland (1810-1894), the Scottish journalist and essayist, is best known as a biographer of the transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson and his management of the liberal *Manchester Examiner*. He was also a close friend of both Robert and Anne Chambers, one of the few trusted with the secret of *Vestiges*' authorship and the figure responsible for finally revealing the truth after the author's death. Robert Cox (1810-1872), fellow conspirator and best friend of Chambers, was the nephew of the Edinburgh phrenologist George Combe, a practicing lawyer and the editor of the *Phrenological Journal* between 1830 and 1837

<sup>4</sup> Efram Sera-Shriar, *The Making of British Anthropology, 1813-1871* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p. 24. See also L.S. Jacyna, *Philosophical Whigs: Medicine, Science and Citizenship in Edinburgh, 1789-1848* (London: Routledge, 1994)

God's interventionist powers and, by extension a threat to the authority of the Church.<sup>5</sup>

While, given the toxicity of the subject matter and the notorious conservatism of Edinburgh's Presbyterian community, such theological criticisms are perhaps unsurprising, the venomous reaction of certain elements of the scientific community to the thesis proposed by *Vestiges*, demands further attention.<sup>6</sup> Though it was frequently attacked in terms similar to those employed by religious commentators, the Cambridge geologist Adam Sedgwick notoriously described its 'rank, unbending and degrading materialism' as a danger to the moral health of the nation, such critiques were supported by demonstrations of the book's inadequate methodology and lack of original research, rather than through assertions of doctrinal authority.<sup>7</sup> What made *Vestiges* a bestseller, its marshalling of different forms of evidence into a grand philosophical scheme, also made it deeply unpalatable to those invested in the exclusivity of their own subject area. As such, the scientific controversy surrounding its publication speaks to broader concerns regarding the status of the expert in a period of democratic reform and dramatically expanding fields of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Though the mid-nineteenth century represents a period in which the sciences worked to solidify a discipline-orientated structure based upon increasing specialisation, this project was one undertaken in conflict with the competing claims of various forms of 'contested' knowledge. Written with the explicit intention of introducing a broad non-specialist audience to a developmental cosmology, *Vestiges* dissolved boundaries between disciplines and placed disputed doctrines such as astrology and mesmerism on an equal footing with the established authority of chemistry, geology, astronomy and natural history. Considered in the relation to the educative goals of *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* and the 'Chambers Elementary Science Manual' (1875), *Vestiges* can

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Miller, 'The Physical Science Chair', *Witness* (17 Dec. 1845), 2-3. Other tracts published in opposition to *Vestiges* include Samuel R. Bosanquet's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation, its arguments examined and exposed* (1845) and Hugh Miller's *The Footprints of the Creator* (1849), which would eventually outsell the target of its disdain

<sup>6</sup> For accounts of the scientific response to *Vestiges*, see Frank N. Egerton, 'Refutation and Conjecture: Darwin's Response to Sedgwick's Attack on Chambers', *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 1 (1870) 176-83, James Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of the 'Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation'* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Joel S. Schwartz, 'Darwin, Wallace, and Huxley, and *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*', *Journal of Biology*, 23.1 (Spring, 1990), 435-446

<sup>7</sup> Adam Sedgwick, 'Natural History of Creation', *Edinburgh Review* 82 (1845) 3

<sup>8</sup> Richard Yeo, 'Science and Intellectual Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain: Robert Chambers and *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*', *Victorian Studies* 28.1 (Autumn, 1984) 5-31

be read as having pursued a radically democratic epistemology, which for some threatened to undermine the basis of both scientific and theological influence.<sup>9</sup>

To return to the dinner party, where, according to Ireland, the situation had begun to verge on the ridiculous as one guest, ‘a noisy obtrusive *gobe-mouches*, with a strident voice’, hazarded a guess: he ‘addressed himself across the table to a middle-aged lady novelist’: “I have a strong suspicion”, said the questioner, “that my *vis-à-vis*, Mrs. — is the author of that naughty book. Is it not so? Come now, confess. You cannot deny it.”<sup>10</sup> The novelist in question, who was described here as a ‘very clever, eccentric person’, was Catherine Crowe, a well-connected fixture of the capital’s literary scene and a close friend of the household. Born Catherine Stevens, she had spent the early part of her life in Kent before marrying an army officer, Major John Crowe, and giving birth to a son. The details of the first decade after her marriage remain rather clouded, but it is known that by 1838 Crowe was living in Edinburgh, separated from her husband and beginning to find her way as a writer.<sup>11</sup> Described by *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1849 as a ‘leader of literary coteries’ attended by ‘the *habitués* of Queen Street Hall’<sup>12</sup>, Crowe wrote several well-received fictions and contributed frequently to *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* and Charles Dickens’ *Household Words*.<sup>13</sup> Best understood as precursors to the complexly plotted ‘sensation fictions’ that would come to dominate the literary marketplace in the 1860s and 1870s, mid-century novels such as *The Adventures of Susan Hopely: or Circumstantial Evidence* (1841), *Men and Women: or Matrimonial Rights* (1844) and *The Story of Lilly Dawson* (1847) deal in criminality and the hermeneutical process involved in its detection. Though best-known as a novelist, Crowe also published two plays, *Aristodemus* (1838) and *The Cruel Kindness* (1853), a number of books for children that included a version of Harriet

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<sup>9</sup> For a treatment of this theme in a slightly later context see Ruth Barton, ‘An Influential Set of Chaps’: The X-Club and Royal Society Politics 1864-1865’, *The British Journal for the History of Science* 23.1 (March 1990) 53-81

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Ireland, intro. Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* 13<sup>th</sup> edn. (W. & R. Chambers: London and Edinburgh, 1884), p. xxi. The publication of this edition following Chambers’ death in 1871 marks the first time that the identity of the text’s author was verified in public. Though rumors as to Chambers’ involvement had long been in circulation and some of his close friends were informed, no public avowal was ever made

<sup>11</sup> Joanna Wilkes, ‘Crowe, Catherine Ann Stevens (1803-1876)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>12</sup> Literary and Scientific Society of Edinburgh 1848-9’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* (January 1849), 55

<sup>13</sup> Crowe contributed short stories to *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* with reasonable frequency in the 1840s, see: ‘The Story of Gaspar Mendez’ 10 January 1852, 18-22, ‘The Lost Portrait’ 18 September 1847, 178-183, ‘Madame Louise’ 5 November 1847, 289-293, ‘The Brides Journey’ 11 October 1845, 232-237, ‘Louis Mandrin’ 25 July 1846, 51-54 and ‘The Tile-Burner and His Family’ 14 February 1846, 99-103

Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* tailored for younger readers, and a collection of supernatural tales, *Ghost Stories and Family Legends* (1859).

In addition to this prodigious and varied literary output, Crowe also established, as Ireland had it, 'a reputation for dabbling a little in science'.<sup>14</sup> This 'dabbling' may account, in part, for her popularity as candidate for the *Vestiges* authorship, as its critics frequently attributed the text's tendency toward conjecture and its refusal to properly attend to factual details as betraying the laxity of female authorship.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, however, it was Crowe's involvement in the city's phrenological circle and her friendship with its primary British theorist, George Combe that implicated her further in the scandal. In his *The Constitution of Man in Relation to External Objects* (1828), a work that expanded on the work of Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, Combe had established himself as Britain's chief proponent of the science, and under his guidance Edinburgh became a key site of activity in the field.<sup>16</sup> Chambers was a key member of this intellectual community, and as is suggested by the popular attribution of *Vestiges* to Combe—who remained the author credited in the British Museum catalogue until 1877—phrenological principles lay at the heart of his revolutionary vision of human development.<sup>17</sup>

Operating on the premise that the brain is in truth an organ of mind, with localised mental functions readable through the shape of the skull, this new science of mind promised that, once accurately mapped, these lumps and bumps gave over an account of an individual's character. Promoted as a uniquely democratic form of scientific enquiry, phrenological principles and techniques offered an easily graspable mental philosophy accessible to the layperson. As historians of science like Roger Cooter and Steven Shapin have demonstrated, phrenology also offered a means to understand man's place in the natural order and provided an impetus for political and institutional reform.<sup>18</sup> As Cooter notes, while Combe and his followers did little to

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<sup>14</sup> Ireland, p. xxi

<sup>15</sup> Adam Sedgwick, 'Natural History of Creation', *Edinburgh Review* 82 (1845) 3-4 and David Brewster, 'Explanations of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation', *North British Review*, 4 (1846), 503

<sup>16</sup> See Steven Shapin, 'Phrenological Knowledge and the Social Structure of Early Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh', *Annals of Science* 32 (1975), 219-43

<sup>17</sup> The Chambers family were actively involved in Edinburgh's phrenology community: William and Robert produced a cheap fourth edition of Combe's *Constitution* in 1835, based their textbook series 'Chambers's Introductory Course' on phrenological dictates

<sup>18</sup> Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Steven Shapin, 'The Politics of Observation: Cerebral Anatomy and Social Interests in the Edinburgh Phrenology Disputes'

alter the ‘doctrines’ of phrenology as set down by earlier continental theorists, they ‘elaborated it differently’ to appeal to ‘an expanding population of practical-minded improvers’.<sup>19</sup> Brought together by their shared membership of the Phrenological Society of Edinburgh, this circle of friends and acquaintances found commonality in a shared vision of progressive social change conceptually underpinned by the surety of a scientific cosmology.

The narrative that appears to emerge, then, in the first version of this ‘ludicrous incident’ at the Chambers’ Doune Terrace house, is one of a revolutionary theory of human development formed by the rationalist heritage of the Enlightenment, situated in opposition to the city’s evangelical Presbyterianism, incubated by the middle-class liberalism of the *Edinburgh Review* and *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, and guided by the friendship of a like-minded social circle. Such a version of mid-century Edinburgh could not seem further removed from the ghostly doubles, spectral funeral shrouds and eerie predictions of the second sight tradition of the Highlands and Islands. Yet it is the work of this chapter, against this assumption, to argue for the proximity of prophetic narratives to the formation of this particular intellectual terrain. As such this project does not situate itself in opposition to the concerns of Robert Chambers and his educated guests—it does not seek to bifurcate Highland superstition from Lowland rationality—but rather considers the second-sighted prophecy constructed and re-constructed under the gaze of new theories of mind and body circulating within this extended network. Respecting Bruno Latour’s disavowal of the partitioning of scientific and religious thinking, and particularly his reformulation of the question ‘Is it real or is it constructed?’ to ‘Is it constructed well enough to become an autonomous fact?’ it is possible to read the discontinuous space inhabited by second-sighted vision as provoking a necessary disassembly of divisions between metaphysical and scientific cosmologies.<sup>20</sup> As is demonstrated by the *Vestiges* scandal, the intellectual landscape

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in R. Wallis, ed., *On the Margins of Science: The Social Construction of Rejected Knowledge* (Keele: University of Keele, 1979), pp. 139-78

<sup>19</sup> Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 7

<sup>20</sup> In this text Latour calls for a non polarized version of the nature/culture debate: to transform ‘The first, traditional, fight, has pitted science—defined as the grasp of the visible, the near, the close, the impersonal, the knowable—against religion, which is supposed to deal with the far, the vague, the mysterious, the personal, the uncertain, and the unknowable’ and ‘to move the reader from one opposition between science and religious, to another one between two types of objectivity’, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* trans. Catherine Porter and Heather MacLean (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2010), p. 274

inhabited by Chambers and his guests was one in which marginal and established disciplines operated in close and problematic immediacy to one another, and is in these smudged areas, that the fabled power of second sight and its prophetic narratives are reformed for a mid-century cosmopolitan audience.

Prominent in this history are developing discourses around the theory and practice of animal magnetism or, as it was more commonly termed in Britain, mesmerism. Broadly based around the theory of ‘universal fluid’ an ethereal substance acting inside and outside of the body, the manipulation of which could serve a healing purpose, mesmerism offered not only boundless therapeutic possibilities, but also provided a new language by which to conceptualise the human mind and its architecture.<sup>21</sup> In one of the few dedicated scholarly accounts of second sight, A. J. L. Busst contends that interest in the tradition reached a peak in the Romantic period before its corpse lights, fetches, death shrouds and premonitions were demoted to the status of outmoded illustrations of mesmeric activity. As Busst suggests, ‘second sight would become perfectly credible if it could be shown to be a local manifestation of a universal phenomenon. Animal magnetism, with its somnambulistic prophetic vision, was to provide just that universal context’.<sup>22</sup> This analysis reifies a broad critical consensus over the origins and form of mesmeric theory and practice in nineteenth-century Britain. Though varying greatly in their approach, scholarly accounts of the topic are largely in agreement with regard to the primacy of continental theorists in shaping the British response to mesmerism: lacking a viable tradition of their own, domestic practitioners repeated and often diluted the work of French and German mesmerists.<sup>23</sup>

Yet homegrown traditions were not so easily dismissed and rather than a pale imitation of its European forerunners, British mesmerism was shaped by native supernatural, mystical and folkloric tropes. Second sight, a phenomenon widely popularised by the literature, antiquarian studies and travel narratives of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries contributed its imagery, history and

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<sup>21</sup>First developed by a German physician, Franz Anton Mesmer (1774-1815), *magnétisme animal* was the subject of a French Royal Commission in 1784, which found no convincing evidence of the existence of a mysterious magnetic fluid. Despite this variations of the magnetic cure and versions of mesmeric theory occupied several European countries into the early part of the nineteenth century

<sup>22</sup> A.J.L. Busst, ‘Scottish Second Sight: The Rise and Fall of a European Myth’, *European Romantic Review* 5.2 (Winter, 1995) 149-177

<sup>23</sup>See Adam Crabtree, *Animal Magnetism, Early Hypnotism and Psychical Research 1766-1925* (New York: Krus International Publications, 1988) and Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)



mechanisms to mesmeric conceptions of extra-sensory seeing. Thus to assert that the power of second sight is demoted to become an outmoded synonym for clairvoyance constitutes an over-simplification that negates continued assertions of its specificity. In an 1845 article published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Journal*, for example, the author is keen to draw a subtle yet essential distinction between two forms of extra-sensory vision: while the clairvoyant abilities associated with magnetic sleep represents the 'power of perception without the use of the visual organs', second sight remains 'the power of prediction respecting the mesmeric state or remedial agencies'.<sup>24</sup> Considered in light of Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's discussion of hypnotism as presenting certain methodological difficulties, for 'hypnosis is only one name among many that designate the elusive X we are trying to grasp [...] each of these ways of naming brings with it not only a different theory but also a different phenomenon', it is necessary to consider what etymological questions need to be asked of *second sight*.<sup>25</sup> By ascertaining what the term connoted in relation to mesmerism it becomes possible to bring into relief the influence of national traditions on the evolution of this discourse.

Differences, of course, remain. The previous chapter detailed the popularisation of a second sight canon in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, and the convergence of this folkloric tradition with post-Enlightenment thinking and Romantic poetics. From this discussion emerged an established imagery of seership: those blessed or cursed with second sight were male, typically uneducated, native Gaelic speakers, resident in the remote wilds of the Scottish Highlands and of a dreamy but unaffected temperament. By the mid-nineteenth century a phenomenon that previously existed as part of the folklore of a geographically, culturally, and linguistically distant peoples was now found in middle-class parlors, theatres, lecture halls and medical schools across the country. While Busst reads this diffusion as evidence of its assimilation into a broader discourse, this chapter seeks to underline the areas in which second sight retained specific cultural, racial and national meanings. In the first instance, though it began to act outside of its traditional geographical situation it continued to carry with it a peculiarly 'Scottish' resonance: when, for example, a 'Master McKean' performed his 'double-sighted'

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<sup>24</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (February 1845), 220

<sup>25</sup> Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 98-9

skills for a London audience at the Egyptian Hall, the young Highlander did so ‘dressed in plaid’.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, it remained distinguished by its prophetic capacity. Though by the mid-nineteenth century the term clairvoyance, from the French *clair* (clear) and *voir* (to see), had been adopted into common English usage, it denoted a fairly broad range of extra-sensory experiences.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, the fulfillment of a second-sighted prediction suggested a teleological process, by which the materials of reality were compelled to fulfill and make real that vision. Such a disruption had implications for theories of mind and vision, but it also raised questions regarding the discursive negotiation of time. This chapter is concerned with not only how second sight was historically constituted—by literary, religious, social and scientific discourses—but also how such prophetic powers were compelled to produce their own accounts of history. Further, outside of these discursive sites, narratives of prevision in this period uncovered new strategies of embodiment in both the physically determinist models offered up by phrenology—wherein the belief in a particular piece of folklore is attributable to the innate characteristics of a people—and in the prophetic performances and spiritual insights unearthed in magnetic sleep.

A personal anecdote, told from a position inside the Edinburgh circle, brings together several lines of enquiry pursued by this chapter. In her autobiographical *Records of Later Life* (1882), the actress Fanny Kemble recalled a stay with her cousin Cecilia Combe in Edinburgh and an encounter with an unusual female author, ‘Cathleen Crowe’. The actress described a visit by the famous black mesmerist Dr. H. E. Lewis to the Combe residence and the ‘quasi-diabolical’ effect his ‘lithe black hand’ stretching ‘nearer and nearer its victim’ has on Mrs. Crowe, which she attributed not to the skill of the mesmerist but rather to the author’s ‘preposterous *organ of wonder*’.<sup>28</sup> Acted out in the home of one of the capital’s prominent families, this enchantment recast domestic space as the site of uncanny performance and experimentation. Lewis was one of a number of itinerant American lecturers operating in Britain, who was elsewhere described as practicing a form of ‘electrobiolgy’ whereby through an ‘energetic concentration of will’ he was enabled

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<sup>26</sup> ‘The Double-Sighted Phenomenon’, *Derby Mercury* 7 December 1831

<sup>27</sup> “clairvoyance, n.”. OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. 18 September 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk/view/Entry/33658?redirectedFrom=clairvoyance&>>

<sup>28</sup> Fanny Anne Kemble, *Records of Later Life* Vol. II, (London: Richard Bentley, 1888), p. 80 (my italics)

to act magnetically upon the mental action of another.<sup>29</sup> In his interaction with the Combe household, however, Lewis's particular mesmeric practice was forced into competing interpretative frames: possession and ecstatic religious experience in Crowe's 'temporary fit of insanity' wherein she is visited by 'the Virgin Mary and Our Saviour' competes with the biological determinism offered up in the form of Kemble's mocking phrenological diagnosis.<sup>30</sup> As is illustrated by the multiple readings to which Lewis was subject to, outside of a basic underlying conceptual structure, little consensus existed over the proper purpose of this newly detected force, and while advocates from mainstream science asserted its provenance in the material world, a chorus of other voices insisted upon mesmerism's spiritual or supernatural nature.<sup>31</sup> It is at this point of disciplinary indecision that native traditions like second sight intervene, bringing folkloric, mythic and religious resonances to bear upon the social construction of a new scientific regime.

Catherine Crowe is a particularly useful figure to begin a reading of the transformations enacted on and by second sight in this period. This is partly because her prominent role in Edinburgh literary life and wide ranging intellectual interests open up unrecognised connections between individuals and subject areas. More specifically, her biography offers insight into the relations between discursive and embodied expressions of prophecy or extra-sensory experience. In the text for which she is now best remembered, *The Night Side of Nature, or Ghosts and Ghost-Seers* (1848), Crowe provided an historical account of dreams, ghostly warnings, wraiths, presentiments, apparitions, poltergeists and doubling, with the aim of instituting a newly open-minded ghost-seeing culture. The text negotiated a discursive space between folklore and didactic argument, by which oral histories, local narratives and circulated mythologies were collected and reproduced in order to argue for the continued existence of the supernatural or simply, the strange. Considering this polemic alongside Crowe's personal encounters with 'diabolical' effects and 'lithe black hand[s]', it is possible to begin a reading of visionary experience that situates it as a point of negotiation between texts and bodies acting in public space. In a letter to Lady Ashburton on 28 June 1848, the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle reported

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<sup>29</sup> William Gregory, *Letters to a Candid Inquire, on Animal Magnetism* (London: Taylor, Walton and Maberly, 1851), pp. 154-155

<sup>30</sup> Kemble, p. 80

<sup>31</sup> This incident is also discussed in W. D. King's 'Shadow of a Mesmeriser: The Female Body on the Dark Stage', *Theatre Journal* 49.2 (May, 1997) 189-206

that ‘Emerson is coming here tomorrow evening and Mrs. Crowe with the *eyes*’.<sup>32</sup> Reading Crowe in the context of mid-nineteenth-century Edinburgh, this chapter seeks to unpack what having ‘the *eyes*’ might mean in this historical moment: the observational practices or authorial practices it connotes, and what these visual regimes might communicate to our reading of second sight.

## 2.1 SUPERNATURAL DEBUNKERS AND THE SPIRITUAL EYE

In ‘What Was It?: A Mystery’ (1857), a short story by the Irish-American author Fitz-James O’Brien, an unscrupulous landlady convinces her tenants to rent a reputedly haunted, but enticingly cheap, property in upstate New York. On their first evening in the house the conversation around the dinner table is dominated by questions of the supernatural and what terrors the night might bring with it. One of the boarders has, we are told, has prepared for what lies ahead by purchasing ‘Mrs. Crowe’s ‘Night Side of Nature’ for his own private delectation’. This fact makes him deeply unpopular with the rest of the group who chastise him for ‘not having bought twenty copies’ and when he ‘incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized up and read aloud in secret places to a select few’.<sup>33</sup> Within this fictional space Crowe’s text fulfills two related functions, acting as both an informative primer for the expectant ghost seer and the possible cause of ghost seeing itself—as reading the book provokes ‘an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form’.<sup>34</sup> Its inclusion here is partly an expression of the book’s popularity, published in two volumes and running through sixteen editions in six years, *The Night Side* was widely disseminated through the popular press with select narratives often reprinted in isolation, but it is also a reflection of the centrality of this work to mid-century debates concerning the limits of the ‘natural’ and the reliability of the human eye as the primary sensory assessor of exterior reality. Moreover, by having his characters read *The Night Side* the author underlines the ‘factualizing’ elements of his narrative and of the ghost story genre more widely.<sup>35</sup> This self-reflexivity, by which a

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Carlyle to Lady Ashburton 28 June 1848, *The Carlyle Letters Online [CLO]*, ed. Brent E. Kinser, Duke University Press, 14 September 2007, accessed 18 September 2013 (original italics)

<sup>33</sup> Reproduced in Fitz-James O’Brien, *Fantastic Tales of Fitz-James O’Brien*, ed. Michael Hayes (London: John Calder, 1977), pp. 55-67 (55)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 55

<sup>35</sup> Michael Cox and R.A. Gilbert, into. *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), see also Julia Briggs, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*

polemic on the ‘reality’ of apparitions is placed in the service of a fictional one, highlights the strategic echoes between veridical and imagined phenomena, which are as common to Crowe’s study as they are to the Victorian ghost story.

A hermeneutically slippery text, *The Night Side* simultaneously embodied the traits of empirical, antiquarian, biographical and fictional genres, as famous hauntings from history are discussed alongside the uncanny experiences of the author’s acquaintances and insights garnered from phrenology are placed in communication with Classical theorists and peasant folk culture. This complex methodology is marshaled in defence of the strange or the unexplainable against the territorial dominance of ‘pharasical scepticism’ that ‘denies without enquiry’, and which is ‘much more contemptible than the blind credulity which accepts all that it is taught without enquiry; it is indeed but another form of ignorance assuming to be knowledge’.<sup>36</sup> This materialist arrogance is, Crowe asserted, a lingering after-effect of the Enlightenment’s reaction against the excessive ‘credulity’ of the seventeenth century, and she entreated her Victorian reader to adopt a more balanced approach to questions of the supernatural.<sup>37</sup> Contemporary reviews of *The Night Side* habitually imagined the book itself as a kind of ghostly revenant returning to puncture terrestrial incredulity: *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* described it as ‘published for the purpose of rationalising the ancient, though of late exploded belief in prophetic dreams, spiritual appearances and other mysterious things’, while *The Athenaeum* cited its publication as evidence that, ‘The powers which some centuries ago ruled the world, and which have never lost all their dominion, are concentrating their scattered and remembered detachments to try the chance of one great battle for the recovery of their empire’.<sup>38</sup> Read in light of Lorraine Datson and Katherine Park’s marrying the conditions of secular modernity to the methodical exclusion of ‘wonders from the realm of the possible, the seemly and the safe’, *The Night Side’s* defence of credulity should be

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(London: Faber, 1977), Margaret L. Carter, *Specter or Delusion? The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction* (London, 1987), Brian Cosgrove, *Literature and the Supernatural* (Dublin: Columbia Press, 1995)

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature, Or Ghosts and Ghost-Seers*, 2 Vols. (London: T.C. Newby, 1848), vol. 1 p. 3

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2

<sup>38</sup> ‘The Night Side of Nature’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, Feb 12 1848, 215 and ‘*The Night Side of Nature; or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*’ *The Athenaeum* 22 January, 1848, 79-80 (79)

understood in terms of a wider argument concerning what types of insight may have been sacrificed by this cultural shift.<sup>39</sup>

By the close of ‘What Was It?’ the curious tenants, having battled with an invisible but physically powerful force that attacks one of their members, leave assured of the material reality of their shared experience and its deserved place in ‘the annuals of the mysteries of physical science’.<sup>40</sup> The story opens, however, by throwing the characters’ ability to accurately interpret such events into doubt. In addition to reading *The Night Side*, two of the guests finding themselves in a ‘metaphysical mood’ before bed, discuss the horrors offered by modern fiction: “The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown’s novel of ‘Wieland’ is awful; so is that picture of the Dweller in the Threshold, in Bulwer’s ‘Zanoni’”.<sup>41</sup> In a narrative movement replicated by many Victorian ghost stories and an expression of what Peter Lamont has termed the ‘crisis of evidence’ pervading mid-nineteenth-century culture, O’Brien allows for the possibility that the ghostly incidents recalled may be as accountable to a temporary delusion on the part of the observer, as they are to the machinations of exterior forces.<sup>42</sup> Recounted in the first-person without the mediation of an omnipresent author, the story invites the reader to speculate on the interpretative faculties and mental coherence of its narrator. This dynamic is indebted, in part, to a rich tradition of supernatural debunking tracts dating back to the early decades of the nineteenth century—against which Crowe situates her open-minded thesis. Common to these texts, which include John Ferriar’s *Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (1813), Samuel Hibbert-Ware’s *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions* (1825) and John Netten Radcliffe’s *Fiends, Ghosts and Sprites* (1854), is a psychopathological model of ghost-seeing that situates the experience within the deluded eye of the beholder, led astray by either phantasmagorical technologies or confused visual memories.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Lorraine Datson and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Press, 1998), p. 341

<sup>40</sup> O’Brien, p. 55. ‘What Was It?’ is widely credited, along with Ambrose Bierce’s ‘The Damned Thing’ as including one of the first instances of an invisible man—an organic being transparent to light—in fiction, see Alessandra Calanchi’s *Dismissing the Body: Strange Cases of Fictional Invisibility* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1999) for a discussion of this literary trope.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60

<sup>42</sup> Peter Lamont, ‘Spiritualism and the Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence’, *The Historical Journal*, 47.4 (2004) 897-920, see also: Srdjan Smajic’s *Ghost-Seers, Detectives and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) offers a recent account of the close relationship between optical theory, psychology and supernatural fiction

<sup>43</sup> Other texts within this tradition include Robert Buchanan’s *The Origin and Nature of Ghosts, Demons and Spectral Illusions Generally, Familiarly Explained and Illustrated* (1840), Charles Ollier’s *Fallacy of Ghosts*,

The former position was most fully explored by the Scottish physicist, optical theorist and inventor of the kaleidoscope, David Brewster in his *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832). Intended to complement Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology* (1830), which had dismissed supernatural experience as the result of excited passions and unscientific thinking, Brewster applied his extensive knowledge of optical technology to demystify phenomena once thought unexplainable or diabolical. Identifying the eye as the 'principal seat of the supernatural', he attributed ghost seeing to a superstitious misreading of natural occurrences like retinal after-images and blind spots, which was often encouraged by phantasmagoric technologies.<sup>44</sup> For Brewster, an Edinburgh Calvinist who condemned *Vestiges* as 'prophetic of infidel times', the democratisation of knowledge regarding such illusionary mechanisms occupied a complex theological space. In the first instance, the transformation enacted by expository texts, wherein a once divinely purposed organ becomes the site of fallacious perception, frequently attracted charges of Sadduceeism and materialism from those keen to maintain doctrinal authority on the subject of the supernatural. *Letters on Natural Magic* attempted to refute these accusations by not only placing science in the service of religion by demonstrating the wonders of God's 'natural magic', but also by recruiting it in the exposure of false religion embodied, for Brewster, in the Catholic Church's manipulation of illusionary technologies.<sup>45</sup> Yet as Jonathan Crary has commented, this programme of dissemination had the unintended effect of collapsing an 'older model of power onto a single human subject, transforming each observer into simultaneously the magician and the deceived'.<sup>46</sup>

At play in *Letters on Natural Magic* was a literal and metaphorical limiting of the human vision, or as Crary has it, a grounding of the 'truth of vision in the density and materiality of the body'.<sup>47</sup> One of the consequences of this developing retinal paradigm was a growing consensus over the role of individual pathology in producing

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*Dreams, and Omens; With Stories of Witchcraft, Life-in-Death, and Monomania* (London, 1848) and John Netten Radcliffe's *Fiends, Ghosts and Sprites* (1854)

<sup>44</sup> David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic, addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), p. 21

<sup>45</sup> [David Brewster], 'Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation', *North British Review*, 3 (1845), 471

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington MA, MIT Press, 1992), p. 133. Along similar lines Terry Castle has proposed, in relation to the theatrical ghost-seeing productions of the eighteenth century, that 'even as it supposedly explained apparitions away, the spectral technology of the phantasmagoria recreated the emotional aura of the supernatural, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York and Oxford, 1995), pp. 143-4

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Crary, 'Unbinding Vision', *MIT Press* 68 (Spring, 1994), 21-44 (21)

uncanny experience. In *Letters on Demonology*, for instance, Walter Scott described ghost seeing as ‘entirely of a bodily character’ consisting ‘principally of a disease of the visual organs, which present to the patient a set of spectres or appearances, which have no actual existence’.<sup>48</sup> An 1841 article entitled ‘Sketches of Superstitions’ for *Chambers’s Edinburgh Magazine*, described second sight along similar lines. Designated as a variety of ‘spectral illusion’, the uncanny visionary abilities of the Scottish Highlander were accounted for in language common to anti-supernatural tracts: ‘Certain mental functions becoming diseased, the sense of sight is imposed upon by the appearance of things which are purely imaginary, but nonetheless supposed to be prophetic of future events’. This particular form of delusion, moreover, enjoys support from both the mental character and external circumstances of the seer, by ‘Idleness, solitude, insufficient diet and an imagination led astray’.<sup>49</sup>

It is against this discursive shift toward biologically and environmentally determinist models, that Crowe positioned her account and its call for an investigative approach to reports of uncanny phenomena like ghostly warnings, wraiths, presentiments, apparitions and poltergeists. Defining her project as a ‘desire to awaken’ her reader to the possibility that such strange things ‘*may be so*’ and as such are worthy of objective consideration, Crowe’s methodology was geared toward a re-orientation of the meaning ascribed by such terms as ‘natural’, ‘supernatural’ and ‘preternatural’.<sup>50</sup> This involved a re-drawing of ontological borders, so that occurrences once designated as supernatural, beyond nature and thus open to falsification, were absorbed into the realm of the preternatural, where they skirted the edges of the natural but were ultimately contained by that category. From the book’s preface, which explained that its title is derived from a German astronomical term for the side of the earth furthest from the sun, it was made clear that the phenomena held up for scrutiny belonged not to other worlds, but to a ‘*veiled department of nature*’.<sup>51</sup> In a distorted echo of Brewster’s thesis, the interrogation of these ‘vague and misty perceptions’ was asserted as an important devotional duty: ‘God’, we are assured, ‘works by natural laws, of which we yet know very little’ and as such, ‘what appears to

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<sup>48</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology, addressed to J. G. Lockhart* (London: Murray, 1830, p. 27

<sup>49</sup> ‘Sketches of Superstitions’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* 2 January 1841), 395-398 (395)

<sup>50</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 1 p. 242 (original italics). Lorraine Daston’s ‘Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe’, *Critical Inquiry* 1 (Autumn, 1991) 93-124 provides an account of the multiple meanings ascribed to the terms ‘preternatural’ and ‘supernatural’ ascribed by natural philosophy and theology in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century

<sup>51</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 1, p. iv



us supernatural, only appears so from our ignorance'; a perceptual failing that should be countered through a cultivation of 'whatever faculties or powers he has endowed us with'.<sup>52</sup> The human eye is indeed limited in its powers, Crowe avows, as we are surrounded by sub-visible matter and forces—vapours, gases, light waves, vibrations—that only become detectable through the aid of 'artificial appliances' and 'many other things which we cannot see even with them', but retinal vision composes only one species of 'seeing'.<sup>53</sup>

A review printed in *The Athenaeum* recognised *The Night Side* as belonging to a broader 'School of thought' that refers 'once supernatural appearances to natural causes', before identifying 'Mesmerism' as 'the phase of science which is most effective for the purpose'.<sup>54</sup> Predicated on the concept of an unseen universal fluid or powerful influences acting on and through the body, animal magnetism relied upon an expanded version of the 'natural', which welcomed the inclusion of invisible powers and energies. The terminology and intellectual framework offered up by this heterodox science were put to work in Crowe's taxonomy of nature's dark side, in which historic and contemporary reports of strange happenings were re-conceptualised through the mesmeric language of sympathy, influence and transmission. Most productive were the abnormal states of consciousness cultivated by mesmerism, which in addition to composing key sites of magnetic healing, also provided a dreamy space in which to explore, has Crowe had it, 'perceptions which are not comprised with the function of our bodily organs'.<sup>55</sup> Discussing the similarities between 'second sight' and 'clairvoyance', the author suggested that the two occur in '*temporary magnetic states*', wherein the 'untrammelled spirit', freed from the distractions of the corporeal senses, gains access to 'scenes to be transacting at a distance' or to 'be acted at some future period'.<sup>56</sup> Against the retinal paradigm established by anti-supernatural writers, in which second-sighted visions were attributed to potentially pathological confusions of the eye, the altered mental conditions explored by 'magnetism' provided a means to re-frame questions of the phenomenon's veracity with recourse to the operations of 'inner vision' or 'spiritual seeing'. Where the spectral illusion model established, as Shane McCorrstine has

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<sup>52</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 2, pp. 349-50

<sup>53</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 1, p. 18

<sup>54</sup> 'The Night Side of Nature; or Ghosts and Ghost Seers', *The Athenaeum* (January 1848), 79-80 (79)

<sup>55</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 1, p. 20

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57 (my italics)

suggested, ‘the co-identity of dreams and hallucinations’, the pedagogical underpinnings of mesmeric theory appeared to undermine this equivalency by conceptualising the trance as a potentially non-pathological state of consciousness.<sup>57</sup> Second sight, for Crowe then, was a visionary capability composed through the elision of the body, whereby questions concerning the eye’s observational abilities were superseded by speculations regarding what type of information it is possible to gather by interior visionary experiences.

Aligning her project with the marginal sciences pursued by her Edinburgh friends and contemporaries, Crowe uncovered commonality in the pursuit of a shared materialist enemy: like the strange happenings recounted in *The Night Side*, ‘phrenology and mesmerism testify that any discovery tending to throw light on what most deeply concerns us, namely, our own being, must be prepared to encounter a storm of angry persecution’.<sup>58</sup> Extending this enthusiasm beyond the argument pursued by her bestseller, the author submitted a number of supportive articles on the topic of mesmerism to *Chambers’s Edinburgh Review*. One of these, published in May 1851, outlined six ‘principle stages in the development of the mesmeric powers’, the pinnacle of which greatly resembled those powers previously associated with the second sighted: ‘To this stage belongs the remarkable phenomenon of *mental travelling* by entranced persons [in which] the mind of the clairvoyant actually pays a visit to the scene in question, and can see things, or pass on to remote places, of which the fellow-traveller has no cognisance’.<sup>59</sup> Clairvoyance could then, if interpreted correctly, provide compelling experimental evidence for the reality of phenomena previously confined to peasant lore or designated as superstitious. However, while Crowe may have sought an easy alignment between her project and mesmeric heterodoxies, the two were in actuality largely out of step with one another. Though examples can be cited of writers producing metaphysical readings of mesmeric phenomena, J.C. Colquhoun’s *A History of Magic, Witchcraft and Animal Magnetism* (1851) being among the best known, British proponents in the main sought to expose its physical nature

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<sup>57</sup> Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghost and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 50

<sup>58</sup> *The Night Side* vol. 1, p. 6

<sup>59</sup> Catherine Crowe, ‘Mesmerism’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* 10 May 1851, 195-198 (196). This article follows on from an earlier submission on ‘The Od Force’ on the 8 March 1851, the vitalist power, which its discoverer Baron Carl von Reichenbach likened to magnetism and electricity

and boundless medical application.<sup>60</sup> As Alan Gauld notes, ‘British mesmerists were more pragmatic, more purely interested in the therapeutic benefits of magnetism, less given to speculation and systematization’.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps best exemplified by attempts to promote its use as an analgesic during surgical procedures, most significantly by the Scottish surgeon James Esdaile in India, the middle decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a concerted effort to promote mesmerism as a viable diagnostic and therapeutic tool.<sup>62</sup> Administered in homes, private surgeries and dedicated facilities like the London Mesmeric Infirmary, mesmeric treatment—brought on by passes over the body and prolonged eye contact—was primarily imagined as a means to alleviate bodily ailments or diseases, rather than to facilitate the forms of temporary ekstasis Crowe appeared to seek.<sup>63</sup>

In an address delivered to the London Phrenological Society in 1842, the society’s president William C. Engledue sought to delineate the boundaries of positivist scientific practice and urged his audience that, ‘in our researches we are not to discourse concerning essences, spirits, or the *immaterial mind*, but concerning one of the innumerable modifications of matter; we have to investigate one portion of man’s organism—brain, and we have to determine its peculiar functions’.<sup>64</sup> Recognising mesmerism as a natural corollary to the understandings of mind and matter hypothesised by phrenologists, moves were made in the early 1840s to formally conflate the two as ‘phreno-magnetism’ or ‘phrenomesmerism’. As the *Medico-Chirurgical Review* reported, ‘A marriage extraordinary has lately taken place between phrenology and mesmerism to the great scandal and indignation of the rational and sober advocates of the former science’.<sup>65</sup> Dr. John Elliotson, founder of the London Phrenological Society (1823) and one of mesmerism’s most prominent advocates, engineered this partnership and established in 1843, with the help of Engledue, the movement’s mouthpiece: *The Zoist: A Journal of Cerebral Physiology and Mesmerism, and*

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<sup>60</sup> See also George Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg; or, The Relation of the Developments of Mesmerism to the Doctrines and Disclosures of Swedenborg* (New York: John Allen, 1847)

<sup>61</sup> Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, p. 109

<sup>62</sup> James Esdaile, *Mesmerism in India and its Practical Application in Surgery and Medicine* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847) and see also, John Elliotson, *Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations without Pain in the Mesmeric State* (London: H. Bailliere, 1843)

<sup>63</sup> See Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998) pp. 156-8 for an account of the founding of the London Mesmeric Infirmary

<sup>64</sup> William Engledue, *Cerebral Physiology and Materialism, with the result of the application of animal magnetism to the cerebral organs, An address delivered to the phrenological association of London, June 20, 1842*, (London: J Watson, 1842), p. 4

<sup>65</sup> *The Medico-Chirurgical Review*, quoted in *The Zoist: A Journal of Cerebral Physiology and Mesmerism* (July 1844), 828

*their Applications to Human Welfare*.<sup>66</sup> Recognising phrenological principles as means to social action, ‘the power to solve the unworked problem of human rights and human duties’ and ‘a mighty engine for man’s regeneration, vast in its power and unlimited in its application, rivalling in morals the effects of steam in mechanics’, Elliotson also employed these as materialist bulwarks against the mystical readings of mesmeric phenomena circulating in popular Victorian culture.<sup>67</sup> A typical issue of the *Zoist* ran case studies of mesmeric cures alongside articles on the need for penal, education and medical reform, thus pressing a particular understanding of mind bound to a programme of social change and improvement. Yet for many within the phrenological community, most notably George and Andrew Combe, this partnership threatened to undermine the hard-won respectability of their science. Following the 1842 meeting, in which Engledue had pressed the utility of phreno-mesmerism, the Phrenological Society split along geographical lines, with London supported the affiliation and Edinburgh opposing it.<sup>68</sup>

As this institutional schism underlines, phrenology and mesmerism occupied a similar territory in mid-nineteenth-century Britain: both operated on the fringes of medical orthodoxy and both offered a system of mental philosophy that was accessible to the plebeian experimenter. Part of the difficulty mesmerism posed for theorists like Combe, was that the more sensational phenomena associated with its practice—clairvoyance, thought-reading and so on—brought with them the taint of the supernatural. Even for advocates of phreno-mesmerism like John Elliotson, any hope of establishing medical authority on the basis of mesmerism’s analgesic and curative application rested upon the careful negotiation of the unruly meaning generated by the magnetic sleep. In a *Zoist* article that touched upon prevision, for instance, the faculty is only ascribed significance in terms of its physical manifestation, ‘in the subject of second sight, the eyes are generally described as open, while in these cases [mesmerised clairvoyants] they were closed’, while the content and narrative of the visionary experience remain undisclosed and presumably

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<sup>66</sup> John Elliotson (1791-1868) a physician trained at the University of Edinburgh, integral to the establishment of University College London and one the chief proponents of mesmerism in the mid-century *Human Physiology* (1840), *On Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations Without Pain in the Mesmeric State* (1843) and *Harveian Oration* (1846). *John Elliotson*, ed. Fred Kaplan (1982) provides a useful overview of the doctor’s many articles on the topic.

<sup>67</sup> Jennifer Ruth, “‘Gross Humbug’ or ‘The Language of Truth’? The Case of the *Zoist*”, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 32.4 (Winter, 1999), 299-323

<sup>68</sup> David de Giustino, *Conquest of Mind: Phrenology and Victorian Social Thought* (London: Croom Helm, 1975)

not worthy of comment.<sup>69</sup> When conceived of as a purely physical force acting upon body and mind, phrenomagnetism offered valuable insights into the *physiological* workings of the brain, but of instances in which ‘we are requested to believe that persons [...] know what is going on at a distance, what will happen to persons and places which they have no connection’, Elliotson concludes simply that ‘the matter is too *wonderful* for belief.’<sup>70</sup> Given the virulent opposition that animal magnetism encountered from other physicians and its ideologically precarious position within wider Victorian society, it is arguable that the alternative metaphysical readings of mesmeric phenomena offered by writers like Crowe worked to undermine the legitimising efforts of the practice’s physician advocates. As an 1848 review of *The Night Side* recognised, in the text ‘mesmerism and ghosts are placed in support of each other, like two slanting cards in a house of cards. Either would fall by itself—but together they support each other’.<sup>71</sup> This methodological co-dependency ascribed meanings to the predictions and observations of the entranced mesmeric subject, which were largely uncontainable by the physical paradigm upon which the practice’s tenuous medical authority rested.

In seeking a philosophical and conceptual underpinning for her thesis, Crowe called upon a tradition removed from not only the rhetoric of scepticism dominating discussions of ghost seeing, but also from the materialist limitations of British mesmerism. Three years prior to the publication of her bestseller, Crowe produced a translation of a work by the German poet, philosopher and physician, Justinus Kerner.<sup>72</sup> Recounting his magnetic treatment of Friederike Hauffe, who from an early age claimed to be conscious of the presence of spirits, *Die Seherin von Prevorst* (1829) proved highly influential to Victorian models of the spirit world and popularised the conception of a ‘soul-body’: a nerve force that bridges the gap between soul and body, survives death and habitually makes itself known to the living. The English translation of this text fed an already established popular interest in the unique investigative culture to which Kerner belonged, and which was

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<sup>69</sup>Mr. J. Hands, ‘Cure of a Case of Supposed Consumption’, *The Zoist* (January 1850) 295-297 (297)

<sup>70</sup>John Elliotson, *John Elliotson on Mesmerism* ed. Fred Kaplan (London: Da Capo Press, 1982), p. 153 (my italics)

<sup>71</sup>‘The Night Side of Nature’, *Athenaeum* 22 January 1848, 79

<sup>72</sup>Crowe provides the first English translation in 1845, but there is evidence that the text was read and reviewed in Britain before this date. In 1836 for example, a review describes it as the ideal book for those of a ‘nervous and ghostly turn of mind like ourselves; a tendency which we attribute to an early course of Miss. Radcliffe’s romances’, ‘The Devils Doings, or Warm Work in Wittenberg’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1836). Crowe’s translation of the text was made available in Britain, Ireland and America.

elsewhere demonstrated by *Dublin University Magazine's* publication of a series of articles on German ghosts and popular prophecies.<sup>73</sup> As a precursor to the project undertaken in *The Night Side*, this translation is significant in instituting German sources and in particular, German Romanticism as substantial influences. Privileging altered states of dreaming, reverie and trance as sites in which the human imagination is empowered to transcend the familiar and the commonplace, writers from this tradition engaged animal magnetism as a means of illuminating the connectedness of mind and body, soul and nature. Read through the *naturphilosophie* of translations like Johann Jung-Stilling's *Theory of Pneumatology* (1834) and Joseph Ennemoser's *History of Magic* (1854), animal magnetism divested itself of physiological meanings and substituted these with spiritual and mystical significances.<sup>74</sup> In addition to its distinctly metaphysical preoccupations, writers from this movement distinguished their practice from the one established by physicians like Elliotson by asserting mesmerism as a psychological rather than physical force.

It is at the historical intersection between the European literature of animal magnetism—texts such as Baron Dupotet's *An Introduction to the study of animal magnetism* (1838) and J. P. F. Deleuze's *The History of Animal Magnetism* (1813) for example—and a wider Romantic movement, that the phenomenon of second sight was first initiated into a psycho-poetic tradition in which, as the philosopher G. H. von Schubert had it, 'presentiments and prescriptions characteristic of the somnambulistic and related states, are intimations of a higher stage of being yet to come'.<sup>75</sup> Reifying a broader interest in Scottish history and cemented by translations of Martin Martin's *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1703), James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (1785) and the writings of Sir Walter Scott, the figure of the prophetic 'seer' was formative to the theories of creativity and imagination established by this philosophical movement.<sup>76</sup> Cemented by the popular *märchen* collections of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, German Romanticism established folk metaphysics and the peculiarities of localised narrative forms as key sites of

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<sup>73</sup> McCorristine, pp. 9-10

<sup>74</sup>As Gauld has outlined, while 'early magnetisers regarded themselves as primarily healers [...] the primary interest [became in Germany] not the patient's symptoms, but her clairvoyant gifts, her visions [...] the possible philosophical or religious significance of it all', *The History of Hypnotism* p. 141

<sup>75</sup> G.H. von Schubert quoted in Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism*, p. 142

<sup>76</sup> J. J. Volkmann's *Neueste Reisen durch Schottland und Ireland* (1784) which includes an extract from Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Scotland* (1769), a text which was translated in full in 1780, *Tagebuch einer Reise nach den Hebridischen Inseln mit Doctor Samuel Johnson. Nach der zweyten Ausgabe aus dem Englischen ubersetzt* (1787), Bende

creative inspiration. Formed at a meeting point between re-configured peasant legends and the works of animal magnetists like Johann Carl Passavant's *Untersuchungen über den Lebensmagnetismus und das Hellsehen* (1821) or C. A. F. Klunge's *Versuch einer Darstellung des animalischen Magnetismus als Heilmittel* (1811), second sight became constitutional of a particular mental philosophy. As Peter Womack has written regarding its early nineteenth-century trajectory, the tradition came to embody a merging of the figure of the seer with that of the poet, wherein 'the nostalgic and affective subjectivisation is the mark of identification: the visionary faculty functions as a vehicle for imagining the imagination'.<sup>77</sup> Under Romantic psychology, then, the power of second sight provided a metaphorical expression of the complex relations between creativity and the mysteries of the unconscious mind.<sup>78</sup>

It is possible to imagine *The Night Side* as representing a later iteration of the same discursive mode. Having recounted the case of 'a man of business in Glasgow' who dreamt 'that he saw a coffin, on which was inscribed the name of a friend with the date of death' and who then experienced the unhappy fulfilment of his dream some weeks later, we are offered an explanation. This is an instance, Crowe proposed, of 'second sight in sleep' where 'the external senses, being placed in a negative and passive state' allow the 'universal sense of the immortal spirit within, which sees and hears' to work newly unencumbered.<sup>79</sup> Implicated in this model of seerhship is a renegotiated relation between body and mind: the businessman in this example is not imagined as having fallen prey to delusion and he is not subject to technologies of illusion, rather in dream he is temporarily 'released from the trammels—the dark chamber of the flesh' and is thus enabled to access a privileged form of natural perception unencumbered by corporeal limitations.<sup>80</sup> Attendant on this model of vision is the 'constructive imagination', a concept which at times comes close to covering the same territory as psychological models of hallucination or suggestion, but which ultimately illuminates a particular conception of psychic life. Under certain circumstances, Crowe explained, though 'there may be no outstanding shape' to observe 'the will of the spirit, acting on the constructive imagination of the

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<sup>77</sup>Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 94

<sup>78</sup>See Matt Ffytche, *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern Psyche* (2012) and Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychology* (1994)

<sup>79</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 1, p. 61

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94

seer, enables him to conceive the form, as the spirit itself conceives it'.<sup>81</sup> In an interpretive move akin to the certain iterations of *naturphilosophie* wherein the knowing mind performs an instrumental role in constructing the form and content of reality, Crowe undermined the basis upon which positivist 'truth' established itself by refusing to locate perceptual authority with the bodily senses.

Part of what *The Night Side* offers to a reading of second sight, then, is a way of thinking about the social cadence of 'inner vision' in the mid-nineteenth century. As we have seen, the ascendant discourse of spectral illusions traced a clear connection between physiological optics and the ghost-seeing experience, which effectively relocated supernatural phenomena to the disordered senses of the beholder. This retinal model finds narrative expression in ghost stories like Fitz-James O'Brian's 'What Was It?', whose plots rely upon the cultivation of empiricist uncertainty over the 'truth' of what seems to have been witnessed. As Srdjan Smajic has suggested, Victorian ghost stories are 'narratives about people who cannot *see* otherwise than with their bodily eyes, and who invoke science more often than religion when they see something unexpected, something possibly not of this world'.<sup>82</sup> Yet the presence of Crowe's text here, acting as a guide to the supernatural events about to occur, prompts us to question exactly what kind of seeing *The Night Side* might be said to encourage. In a refutation of the retinal paradigm established by writers like Brewster and Scott, Crowe claimed that if 'spectral illusions are so prevalent, so complicated in their nature, and so delusive', then 'life is reduced to a mere phantasmagoria'.<sup>83</sup> In what amounts to a complex assessment of the relation between sensory perception and the interpretation of reality, the pathologisation of ghost-seeing is imagined here as having precipitated an ontological collapse of the boundary between the real and the illusionary. *The Night Side* extricates sight from this materialist dead end by calling for a fuller appreciation of 'inner' vision as both a creative resource and a shaper of exterior realities. As publications like Charles H. Hinton's 'Seeing With Eyes Shut' and 'The Lost Faculty, or the Sixth Sense' published by *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1856 suggest, Crowe was far from unique in emphasising the import of interiorised sight to our understandings of the mind and its relation to the body. While British mesmerism, in its dogged pursuit of medical

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<sup>81</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 2, p. 63

<sup>82</sup> Srdjan Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 47

<sup>83</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 1, p. 24



respectability, largely evaded the metaphysical questions raised by phenomena like clairvoyance, Crowe recognised—in line with her German sources—magnetic phenomena as evidence of ‘spiritual sight’ in practice.

## 2.2 HIGHLAND SEERS AND LOWLAND SCIENTISTS

Patterned over the course of *The Night Side* is a model of seeing that privileges dream and trance states as sites in which a deeper understanding of the world and the universe becomes newly obtainable. The extraordinary powers of perception evinced by some mesmerised subjects provided examples of, by Crow’s account, faculties that we should ‘exercise and cultivate for the benefit and advancement of our race’, and as such the ‘highly gifted’ somnambulist offered a foretaste of how our perceptive abilities might advance over time.<sup>84</sup> In mid-century discourses concerning mesmerism, questions of what this revolutionary power might achieve for future generations were often placed in negotiation with attempts to trace the power’s antecedents. Publications such as J.C. Colquhoun’s *Isis Revelata: An Inquiry into the Origin, Progress and Present State of Animal Magnetism* (1836) and Joseph Ennemoser’s *History of Magic* (1854) did not begin their accounts of animal magnetism with Franz Anton Mesmer’s discoveries in the 1770s, rather they sought out evidence of its presence throughout history with the express aim of demonstrating the universality of its principles, and moreover, its guaranteed futurity. In his reading of *Vestiges*, James Secord has suggested that the powers of mind mesmerism uncovered and forecasted, ‘might be one indication that what the book had said was true—that the present race might be succeeded by ‘a nobler type of humanity’.<sup>85</sup> Brought to bear upon this sweeping history, which begins with the formation of the solar system and closes with utopian predictions of future states, mesmeric laws here appeared to achieve the status of scientific principles.

A way into thinking about how narratives of second sight might operate and potentially problematise this universality is to consider *Vestiges*’ debt to folklore. Under the guiding influence of his mentor, Walter Scott, Chambers had in his youth

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<sup>84</sup> *The Night Side of Nature*, vol. 2, p. 350

<sup>85</sup> James Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of the ‘Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation’* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 162

characterised himself as primarily ‘antiquarian’, and published several studies of local folklore, Scottish ballads and national character. The oral testimony and migratory mythologies gathered in texts such as *Traditions of Edinburgh* (1824), *Popular Rhymes in Scotland* (1829) and *Scottish Jest and Anecdotes* (1832), provide an alternative model that shadows the Enlightenment cosmologies circulating in *Vestiges*. Chambers’s early antiquarianism, a practice that typically privileges the strange and the singular over the universal and the representative, gestures toward a more complex reading of *Vestiges*’ production of history. In his theorisation of historiographical project, Michael Salber Philips has proposed that the negotiation of historical distance ‘should not be limited to forms of detachment or estrangement [and] must take in the impulse to establish proximity as well as separation’, and the minutiae of the antiquarian arguably allows for that proximity.<sup>86</sup> As Secord has it, ‘*Vestiges* characterised the habits and appearance of extinct trilobites and ammonites with the same care that Scott used to recreate the world of Rob Roy and Edie Ochiltree’.<sup>87</sup> Negotiating the space between deep time and far future, Chambers’s antiquarian and novelistic sympathies insisted upon the possibility of productive engagement with events at extreme temporal remove from the reader. The project undertaken by *The Night Side* strove for a similar intensity of experience and satisfied a similarly antiquarian desire for the singular and the strange. Though its didacticism prevented it from being classed as strictly a folk tale collection like George Dasent’s *Popular Tales for Norse* (1857) or Edward Lane’s *Arabian Nights* (1839-41), it is nonetheless engaged in comparable acts of resurrection, transcription and preservation. Published two years after the coining of the term *folk-lore* and a year before the founding of the new discipline’s forum *Notes and Queries*, *The Night Side* reflects the concerns and methods of the newly named folklorist.<sup>88</sup>

Considering the origins of ‘Fairy Mythology’ in an 1834 article, the historian Thomas Keightley queried whether such beliefs were transmitted between cultures or arose through an ‘independent formation’ based on the ‘original sameness of the human mind’.<sup>89</sup> The conclusion Keightley gestured towards, that particular

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<sup>86</sup> Michael Salber Philips, ‘Histories, Micro- and Literary: Problems of Genre and Distance’, *New Literary History* 34.2 (Spring, 2003) 211-229 (217)

<sup>87</sup> Detecting ‘traces of the generic conventions of historical fiction’ in its narratological schema, James A. Secord has proposed Walter Scott as a shaping influence on *Vestiges*, *Victorian Sensation*, p. 91

<sup>88</sup> Writing under the pseudonym Ambrose Merton in the *Athenaeum*, William John Thoms suggested the term *folk-lore* as a ‘good Saxon compound’ to refer to ‘what we in England designate as Popular Antiquities’

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Keightley, *Tales and Popular Fictions: Their Resemblance, and Transmission from Country to Country* (London: Whittaker and Co, 1834), p. 6

psychological traits might inform oral traditions, reflected a growing consensus over the centrality of customs and superstitions in the delineation of national boundaries. In a similar vein, an article published by *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1843 argued for the primacy of second sight to any mesmeric ethnographic project. This was imagined, importantly, in terms of national identity as the faculty of second sight and its contribution to the development of the mesmeric canon is presented as a source of pride for its country of origin: 'We have reached a stage in Scotland' the author boasts 'which may well make England envious', as while clairvoyance may have originated in France, 'it ought to be remembered that second-sight, and second-hearing, though extinct for generations, was an exclusive attribute of the Scottish Highlanders, and chiefly of the Hebridians; and, consequently, that modern clairvoyance is, in Scotland, but a recovered faculty'.<sup>90</sup> The enthused re-claiming by a respectable Edinburgh periodical of 'modern clairvoyance' as in some way *originally* Scottish raises questions regarding the type of work, cultural or otherwise, to which visionary narratives were being put to in the mid-nineteenth century. Conceptualised as tool for 'imagining the imagination', second sight is also potentially implicated in establishing the imagery, symbolism and history of a nation. This leads us to a fuller understanding of prophetic vision's complex embodiment in this period. While Crowe insisted upon magnetic clairvoyance as an indicator of developmental advancement, which is modelled both spiritually and physically, the configuration of second sight with the attributes of a particular people presses the need to read psychic traits through the discourses of race and nationhood.

The competing demands made on the second sight tradition in the middle of the nineteenth century illuminated the problematics of a national identity being formed in negotiation with not only hegemonic English culture, but undertaken between the country's interior geographical, religious and political constituents. One of the tensions dominating this internal dialogue concerned the continued centrality of a richly imagined Highland history in defining the cultural imagery of the whole country—as is aptly illustrated by the transformation of a geographically remote piece of folklore to a source of national pride. Such instrumental appropriations were most clearly evidenced in the country's burgeoning tourist industry, which marketed Scotland as domestic retreat from the industrial and urban pressures of the south, via an iconography of tartan pageantry, 'ancient' traditions and poetic peasants, in

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<sup>90</sup> 'Magic and Mesmerism', *Tait's Edinburgh Journal* (October 1843), 179

circulation since the eighteenth century. After Queen Victoria and Prince Albert established a summer residence at Balmoral Castle on the banks of the River Dee, and with the completion of the first Anglo-Scottish rail link in 1848, the Highlands were firmly established as an accessible and highly respectable tourist destination for English travellers.<sup>91</sup> Along with the ‘single landscape (misty, mountainous, Highland)’ being, as Penny Fielding has it, ‘repackaged and sold’ to a Victorian audience, the fabled visionary powers of the Gaelic northerner took on a new and complex currency in this revised context.<sup>92</sup> Thinking again about the *Tait’s* article, it is clear that the anxious assertion of the faculty’s etiological primacy was matched here only by a desire to divide second sight, which has been ‘extinct for generations’ from ‘modern clairvoyance’—a temporal disjuncture that sought to locate the Highlands as somehow out of time with the rapidity of developments occurring elsewhere. Respecting Katie Trumpener’s assertion that the English literary canon ‘constitutes itself [...] through the systematic imitation, appropriation and political neutralisation of antiquarian and nationalist literary developments’, it is possible to consider the increasingly institutionalised study of folklore as enacting a similar gesture: situating the futurity of urban modernity in opposition to its anachronistic peripheries.<sup>93</sup>

A short story in *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* from 1860, which satirises the credulity and impressionability of English visitors to the Scottish Highlands, opens up a different reading. Titled, ‘The Second-Sight of Mr. John Bobells’, it recounts a holiday taken by the narrator and his friend, a London stockbroker, to escape ‘metropolitan’ pressures and effect an improving change of ‘constitution’. Mr. John Bobells, however, takes to Highland culture with too much enthusiasm: donning a ‘kilt’, drinking whiskey with ‘avidity’ and learning Gaelic from a drunken piper. Most telling however, is his conviction that he is possessed of a ‘peculiar species of the second sight that never fails’, and that a dream of a funeral procession forecasts his imminent demise. The story concludes not with the fulfilment of this prophecy, however, but with the reassurance that he, ‘did *not* die, according to expectation, but gave up whusky [sic], took to trousers, and has become once more a decent member

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<sup>91</sup> See Katherine Haldane Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland 1770-1830: Creating Caledonia* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2005), Peter Womack’s *Improvement and Romance* (1989) and Janet Sorensen’s *The Grammar of Empire* (2000)

<sup>92</sup>Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 187

<sup>93</sup>Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. i

of the Stock Exchange'.<sup>94</sup> Appearing in an Edinburgh journal politically allied to the progressive liberalism of the city's New Town and positioned alongside articles advocating self-improvement and the efficacy of rational entertainments, this humorous tale should be read as, in part, a morally improving one directed at the folly of superstitions and their ultimate incompatibility with modern life. Beyond straightforward didacticism, the narrative spoke to certain anxieties regarding the cultural imageries of Scotland in circulation south of the border. In the first instance, cementing the Highlands and Islands as a tableau for the edification of the tourist-observer involved a necessary elision of contemporary socio-political realities: while tours of visitors flocked to the sites of historic battles and Queen Victoria laid claim to Stuart heritage, the Clearances entered their final stage and a depleted population faced famine in the potato blight.<sup>95</sup> Conversely, the imposition of a national identity garnered from mythologised versions of the history of Scotland's northern populace and idyllic visions of rural primitivism, presented Lowland intellectuals engaged with processes of rapid industrialisation with a problematic representational negotiation. In what amounted to an imagined re-drawing of the Highland line, some mid-century thinkers sought to distance the country's urban and intellectual centres from the concerns of an increasingly pauperised northern populace. Where the uneducated Gaelic speaker had once been either written into an Enlightenment-led narrative of progress or valorised as the poetic embodiment of a shared national heritage, he now found himself the subject of rather less favourable characterisations.

While in *The Night Side* Crowe refuted the characterisation of second sight as 'a mere superstition of the Highlanders, as simply the idle talk of those who 'know very little of the matter', and insisted upon those possessed of the gift as generally 'individuals above all suspicion', her faith in the testimony of northern seers was not shared by all in her Edinburgh social circle.<sup>96</sup> Particularly revelatory was the attitude of Crowe's friend and mentor, the phrenologist George Combe, to the subject of second sight. The narrative we have thus far charted in relation to phrenology has emphasised its ties to the capital's progressive Whig politics against the 'fossilized

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<sup>94</sup> 'The Second-Sight of Mr. John Bobells', *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* 8 December 1860, 364-66

<sup>95</sup> John Prebble provides a useful timeline of events, citing the period 1840-1854 as that in which the final rounds of clearances and subsequent mass emigrations took place. In 1846 the potato blight destroyed crops and famine followed, with food riots in the following year. By 1852 the Highland and Island Emigration Society had been formed with the purpose of helping the dispossessed to leave Britain, *The Highland Clearances* (London: Penguin Books, 1969)

<sup>96</sup> *The Night Side* vol. 2, p. 328

Scottish history' architecturally embodied by Edinburgh's Old Town and the reformist agenda assured by its democratic epistemology.<sup>97</sup> As a system founded on the notion that psychic traits and all human activities were the expression of particular organs of the brain acting alone or in combination, phrenology relied upon a biologically reductionist model, which was often mirrored in contemporary thinking regarding race, philology and genealogy. This hereditary theme provided an impetus for institutional reform, but it also offered a means to annex, under the guise of science, those elements of Scottish society seemingly antithetical to the values of modern Britain.

Within Edinburgh's wider intellectual community the desire to distinguish the city's scientific and literary endeavours from the regressive nostalgia framing the Highlands was most starkly expressed by emerging ethnographic positions that sought to divide the two in terms of distinct racial heritage. The polygenist racial typologies of Robert Knox, an Edinburgh anatomist famously associated with the body snatching scandals of 1828, drew clear and ideologically weighted distinctions between Lowland and Highland peoples.<sup>98</sup> In his *Races of Men: A Fragment* (1850) Knox asserted that, 'the Caledonian Celt of Scotland appears a race as distinct from the Lowland Saxon of the same country: as Negro from American'. Identifying himself as a 'Saxon', he goes on to characterise Highlanders as lazy, irrational, feminine and beyond reform, but happily on the brink of extinction: 'the Caledonian Celt reaches the end of his career'.<sup>99</sup> Importantly race is realised for Knox primarily in terms of temporality and history making, while the resilient Anglo-Saxon drags civilisation onwards, the 'dreamy Celt, the seer of second sight' lives only in the past—they are 'nature's antiquaries'.<sup>100</sup>

Though this fatal racial taxonomy certainly presents an extreme example, the characterisation of Britain's Celtic races as feckless, devoid of industry and

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<sup>97</sup>As Katherine Haldane Grenier, notes in, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland 1770-1830: Creating Caledonia* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2005), 'Scotland offered a plethora of historic sites, ranging in period from Druidic times to the eighteenth century. One favourite of the Victorian era was Edinburgh's Old Town, described as 'Scottish history fossilized' (135-6)

<sup>98</sup>Knox's adoption of a polygenist position on race—a theory that sees the human race as having descended from different lineages—was undertaken against the grain of the monogenist thinking—which, in line with orthodox Christianity, posits a common descent for all peoples—supported by The Ethnological Society of London and espoused by figures like the historian Thomas Hodgkin and the ethnologist James Cowles Prichard

<sup>99</sup>Robert Knox, *The Races of Man: A Fragment* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1850), p. 379 and 378

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* p. 216

developmentally stalled, resonated something of the increasingly condemnatory attitude adopted by many Lowlanders in relation to the Highlands. As Krisztina Fenyo has demonstrated, press coverage of the potato blight in 1846 and the subsequent famine was far from sympathetic, with the widely read *Scotsman* newspaper most outspoken in querying why the industrious people of the south should be required to give endless aid to fund the idle life of northerners.<sup>101</sup> Further, the question posed by Knox, ‘how to dispose’ of Britain’s Celtic peoples and thus ensure the unhindered progress of the nation, arguably found an answer in the voracious Clearances and the large-scale emigration scheme established by the Highland Destitution Board.<sup>102</sup> The racialist thesis pursued by *Races of Men*, while it did not constitute a consensus view, reflected upon the growing currency of taxonomic practices like craniotomy, anthropometry and comparative anatomy in public scientific culture. In what was partly a sign of the preoccupations of the mainstream medical community and partly the result of its own presuppositions, the study of phrenology was dominated by the question of race. Through the application of an endless variety of cranial measurements, including the cephalic index, the nose index and cephalo-orbital index, it appeared possible to divine the moral and intellectual character of the individual under analysis, which by comparison and conjecture could offer insight into the differences between the races. Considering the demonstrability of its doctrines and its appeal to the plebian experimenter, the anthropologist Peter Pels has proposed that, ‘phrenology may well have been one of the main vehicles by which racism became a popular doctrine’.<sup>103</sup> Though, as Colin Kidd has pointed to, the racial typologies underwriting phrenological discourse could be marshaled in defense of anti-imperialist or anti-slavery positions, within Scotland itself these were more frequently put to work in the bifurcation of the country along racial lines.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Krisztina Fenyo, *Contempt, Sympathy and Romance: Lowland Perceptions of the Highlands and the Clearances During the Famine Years, 1845-1855* (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 2006)

<sup>102</sup> *The Races of Man*, p. 378

<sup>103</sup> Peter Pels, ‘Occult Truths: Race, Conjecture, and Theosophy in Victorian Anthropology’, in *Excluded Ancestors, Inevitable Traditions: Essays Towards a More Inclusive History of Anthropology* ed. Richard Handler (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000) pp. 11-41 (23)

<sup>104</sup> Colin Kidd cites Combe’s support of the black abolitionist Frederick Douglas who visited Scotland in 1846-7 and his characterisation of the British conquest of India as a ‘blunder as well as a crime’, as examples of the surprising compatibility of a belief in ‘racial hierarchy’ with ‘a radical and socially philanthropic outlook’, ‘Race, Empire, and the Limits of Scottish Nationhood’, *The Historical Journal* 46.4 (Dec. 2003), 873-892 (883)

As the founder of the Phrenological Society of Edinburgh (1820) and the author of a bestselling exposition of phrenological principles, *The Constitution of Man*, Combe was an influential advocate and populariser of this new anatomical science. As a method of biological divination, wherein the size of particular organs of the mind gave indications of the character and likely future course of the individual, phrenology could offer a pragmatic framework for institutional improvement. Yet this project depended upon fixing physiology as a reliable index of human behaviours and actions, and this determinism often worked to reify rather than reform established cultural stereotypes and social structures. This was clearly illustrated by Combe's thoughts on Scotland and its peoples. Identifying the Lowland population as a 'mixed race of Celts and Saxons', who are responsible for 'everything by which Scotland is distinguished', Combe attributed the relative socio-economic failings of the Highland population to an 'narrowness in the anterior region' of the brain.<sup>105</sup> Most striking is the Celt's oversized 'organ of *Wonder*', which in his *System of Phrenology* (1825), Combe attributed the tendency 'to believe in dreams, sorcery, astrology, in the mystic influence of spirits and angels, in the power of the devil'. Strange visionary experiences, then, are brought about by the confluence of this physical constitution with a particular topography: 'the Highland mountains, and the wild lawless habits of those who inhabited them [which] were peculiarly adapted to foster the growth of such impressions in imaginative minds'.<sup>106</sup> Under this classificatory scheme second sight retained its status as an inherited trait—as had been established by canonical studies like Theophilus Insulanus's *Treaties on Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (1763) and M. Martin's *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (1703)—but the nature and meaning of this genealogical transmission has shifted. No longer a visionary gift passed through generations of seers, it was transformed under the phrenologist's gaze into a species of imaginative delusion, to which an hereditary propensity to 'wonder' makes certain subjects more prone: recalling the case of a man 'in the west of Scotland, who is liable to spectral illusions', for example, Combe recorded how 'this peculiarity has descended to his son'.<sup>107</sup> Transposing psychological traits onto particular physiognomies, phrenology, in collusion with more orthodox

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<sup>105</sup>George Combe, *A System of Phrenology* (New York: William H. Colyer, 1842), pp. 37-38

<sup>106</sup>*System of Phrenology*, pp. 321-322

<sup>107</sup>*System of Phrenology*, pp. 320-321



ethnographical sciences, thus worked to translate cultural phenomena into coherent racial identities.<sup>108</sup>

Where Crowe understood second-sighted visions as presenting the investigator with certain methodological difficulties regarding the testimony of seers—those from the ‘humbler classes’ being rarely believed and those from the ‘higher’ are generally unwilling to ‘make the subject a matter for conversation’—Combe’s system recognised such experiences as the natural result of an individual predisposition to ‘the unexpected, the grand, the wonderful, and extraordinary’.<sup>109</sup> Phrenological thinking, then, sought to produce the body as a newly legible document whose cranial map revealed, to the enlightened reader, a person’s innate abilities, character traits and likely future potential. With the mid-century partnering of phrenology with mesmerism, this readable body was initiated into increasingly theatrical forms of public display. Where the phrenologist had previously demonstrated his science with reference to the head of a willing audience member or with the aid of the skull of executed criminal or colonial subject, the phrenomesmerist could produce in his entranced patient sentiments or gestures correspondent to the phrenological organ subject to his manipulation: so that touching the organ of ‘Veneration’, say, would induce in the sitter an attitude of prayer, ‘Benevolence’ kindly acts, ‘Self-Esteem’ confident actions, and so on. Popularised by itinerant practitioners and often forming part of the improving curriculum offered by Mechanics’ Institutes, such displays were framed as edifying scientific exhibitions rather than strictly theatrical entertainments.<sup>110</sup>

Though such acts were effective in diffusing knowledge of phrenological and mesmeric principles among those unable to afford expensive publications on the subject, they also underscored a tension between popularisation and professional recognition. Against the perceived aristocratism of the British scientific establishment, proponents of both phrenology and mesmerism emphasised the accessibility of their methods and techniques to a plebeian audience. As is suggested

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<sup>108</sup> See J.W. Jackson, ‘Ethnology and Phrenology as an Aid to the Historian’, *Royal Anthropological Institute* (May, 1863), 118-29 and Paul A. Erickson, ‘Phrenology and Anthropology: The George Combe Connection’, *Current Anthropology* 18.1 (March 1977), 92-3

<sup>109</sup> *The Night Side* vol. 2, p. 328 and George Combe, *The Constitution of Man, Considered in Relation to External Objects* (Boston: Marsh, Caen, Lyon and Webb, 1841), p. 54

<sup>110</sup> Barry Barnes and Stephen Shapin, ‘Science, Nature and Control: Interpreting Mechanics’ Institutes’, *Social Studies of Science* 7.1 (Feb. 1977) 31-74 and Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge, 1986)

by Robert Chambers's description of phrenology as a 'system of mental philosophy for the unlearned man', lay participation in these 'less abstract' sciences of mind was framed by the language of optimistic self-help, popular progress and meritocracy.<sup>111</sup> However, in appealing to the amateur and encouraging experimentation these marginal sciences were unable to control the cultural meanings attached to their practice. As Harriet Martineau—an enthusiastic convert to mesmerism's 'mighty curative powers', a follower of Combe and acquaintance of Crowe—complained in her *Letters on Mesmerism* (1845), 'there is no doubt that the greatest of all injuries done to Mesmerism is by its itinerant advocates'.<sup>112</sup> Insisting upon mesmerism as a highly unsuitable subject for public display, she condemned 'the perilous rashness of making a public exhibition of the solemn wonders yet so new and impressive' and 'exhibiting for money on a stage states of mind and soul held sacred in olden times'.<sup>113</sup> Mesmerism is, Martineau assures her readers, a force capable of great physical and psychological healing, which will never be utilised to its full potential while it remains tainted by theatrical display and individual profiteering.

Yet this insistent bifurcation of autodidact from trained practitioner distracts from the ways in which mesmeric theory was itself formed around the dilemma of performance in relation to public investigative cultures. Part of the problem, as John Elliotson discovered when he attempted to fashion the Irish O'Key sisters into useful medical subjects, was the difficulty in procuring replicable results from the speech and gestures of a mesmerised subject. As W.D. King outlines: the 'pitfall of a system based in the empirical and the repeatable (that is, based on science) is the unique performance and every performance is initially that'.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, while phrenology, despite the heterodoxy of its principles, maintained a hierarchy between scientific observer and passive patient, mesmerism shifted focus to the actions and agency of the patient. As was particularly the case with manifestations of mesmerism's so-called *higher phenomena*—clairvoyance, clairaudience and mindreading—the marvellous

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<sup>111</sup> Robert Chambers quoted in Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 174

<sup>112</sup> Harriet Martineau's (1802-1876) described Combe as being 'the greatest benefactor of his generation, by giving the world his 'Constitution of Man', 'Representative Men' (1861), p. 578. See also Martineau's portrait of Combe in *Biographical Sketches* (1852-1875)

<sup>113</sup> *Letters on Mesmerism* (London: Edward Moxon, 1845), p. 48. These were originally printed a series of letters to the *Athenaeum* in 1844, which positioned the at the centre of a fractious and long-running dialogue over the nature, morality and reality of this invisible yet pervasive force

<sup>114</sup> W. D. King, "'Shadow of a Mesmeriser': The Female Body on the "Dark" Stage', *Theatre Journal* 49.2 (May, 1997) 189-206 (193)

nature of what appeared to be occurring tended to jar with the quasi-materialist framework intended to contain them.

Through 1838, for instance, Elliotson held a series of nationally publicised demonstrations in the theatre of University College Hospital in London, in which he attempted to demonstrate the physiological potentials of this new branch of science. During these demonstrations Elizabeth O'Key—described as ‘of a stunted and spare stature, her countenance being of a chlorite sickness, looking pale and melancholy’—was transformed, under a magnetically induced delirium, from a shy servant girl to confident orator eager to engage the elite intellectual, political and medical figures who composed the audience with jokes, impressions and bawdy songs. For members of the medical community, notably *The Lancet's* founder Thomas Wakley, who were sceptical of mesmerism's scientific potential, these theatrics pointed to fabrication on the part of the subject encouraged by the unforgivable credulity of the physician. Notoriously described as the ‘*prima donnas* of the magnetic stage’, the perceived theatricality of the O'Key sisters' somnambulistic displays had a dual effect: on the one hand they served to associate the patient with the morally dubious theatre actress, and on the other they implied that the communications made and the gestures acted out apparently unconsciously were in actuality part of a wholly conscious performance.<sup>115</sup> Where the hyperformalism of phrenology and the puppetry of phrenomesmeric displays had worked to create easily readable bodies, these unruly performances rendered the medical subject once again open to multiple and conflicting interpretations.<sup>116</sup>

Further problematising Elliotson's attempts to establish epistemological authority on the basis of his UCH demonstrations was a wider culture of medical display in nineteenth-century Britain, which habitually refused the boundaries between scientific lecturing, lay healing and popular entertainment. From its completion in 1812, London's ‘Egyptian Hall’ played host to performances that spanned and dissolved these categories. Located at the eastern side of Piccadilly and modeled after the Temple of Osiris, this remarkable building functioned as a theatrical museum space. Commissioned to house the extensive personal collection of the antiquarian and explorer William Bullock, the Hall also became the site of

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<sup>115</sup> *The Lancet*, 2 September, 1837

<sup>116</sup> Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of the Mind in Victorian* provides a detailed analysis of Elliotson's experiments with the O'Key sisters, *The Lancet's* campaign against them and how their performativity can be situated within a broader culture of working-class theatre going in the early nineteenth century

phantasmagoric projections, panoramas, magic shows, scientific lectures and displays of mysterious powers.<sup>117</sup> Within this early-nineteenth-century space, the power of second sight was subject to multiple and contradictory readings. In December 1831, for example, the *Derby Mercury* published an enthusiastic account of the ‘double-sighted phenomenon’ on display in London’s ‘Egyptian-Hall’ (fig.1). Contributing to what Richard D. Altick has described as ‘a motley potpourri of late Regency and early Victorian entertainments for every taste and every social class’ eight-year-old Lewis Gordon McKean demonstrated extraordinary sensory abilities to an assembled audience.<sup>118</sup> Standing ‘with his back to his visitors, while his father or proprietor puts questions to him suggested by the company, in different objects of sight, upon which he pronounces with the upmost promptitude and accuracy [...] There can be no doubt that the answers proceed from the boy; but by what means he is enabled to give them is a mystery concealed’.<sup>119</sup>

While this is by no means the first instance of a Scottish seer visiting his talents upon an English audience—the deaf-mute and healer Duncan Campbell serves as a well-documented forerunner—they are enacted here in a peculiarly complex cultural space.<sup>120</sup> Billed alongside magic acts predicated on the explicit delusion of the audience that included displays of second sight in their repertoire and platform lectures deriding the faculty as evidential only of the eye’s hallucinatory potentials, McKean’s demonstration of extra-sensory power was subject to continually shifting interpretive parameters.<sup>121</sup> The magic acts of John Henry Anderson or ‘The Wizard of the North’, for instance, featured his blindfolded daughter who was billed as the ‘Second-Sighted Sybil’ and in a series of lectures delivered on the broad topic of medical reform, a physician named Samuel Dickson

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<sup>117</sup>William Bullock (1773-1849) amassed a collection of over 30,000 artifacts gathering from around the world (some of which were acquired by members of the James Cook expeditions). These were first displayed in the Egyptian Hall, before being sold at auction in 1819, and most famously included Napoleon’s carriage ceased at the Battle of Waterloo

<sup>118</sup>Richard Daniel Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge M.A: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 250-51.

<sup>119</sup> ‘The Double-Sighted Phenomenon’, *Derby Mercury* 7 December 1831

<sup>120</sup> Duncan Campbell (1680-1730) arrived in London in around 1694 he courted the attentions of fashionable society through fortune telling. Having eventually run into debt Campbell re-launched himself as provider of magical medicines and published an account, *The Friendly Demon*, of his personal struggle with illness—brought on by the presence of bad demons—and cure by use of a loadstone. An account of his life *Secret Memoirs of the Late Mr. Duncan Campbell* appeared in 1732 and has been attributed to Daniel Defoe

<sup>121</sup>Peter Lamont also discussed Master McKean at the Egyptian Hall in *Extraordinary Beliefs: A Historical Approach to a Psychological Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

cited Samuel Johnson as ‘a believer in ghosts and the second-sight’ in order to demonstrate the fallibility and delusional capacity of even the most learned minds.<sup>122</sup> Duly, the *Derby Mercury’s* account of the 1831 performance closed with an expression of this interpretive multiplicity: is the ‘double-sighted phenomena’ a demonstration of miraculous power or ‘the results of art’?<sup>123</sup>

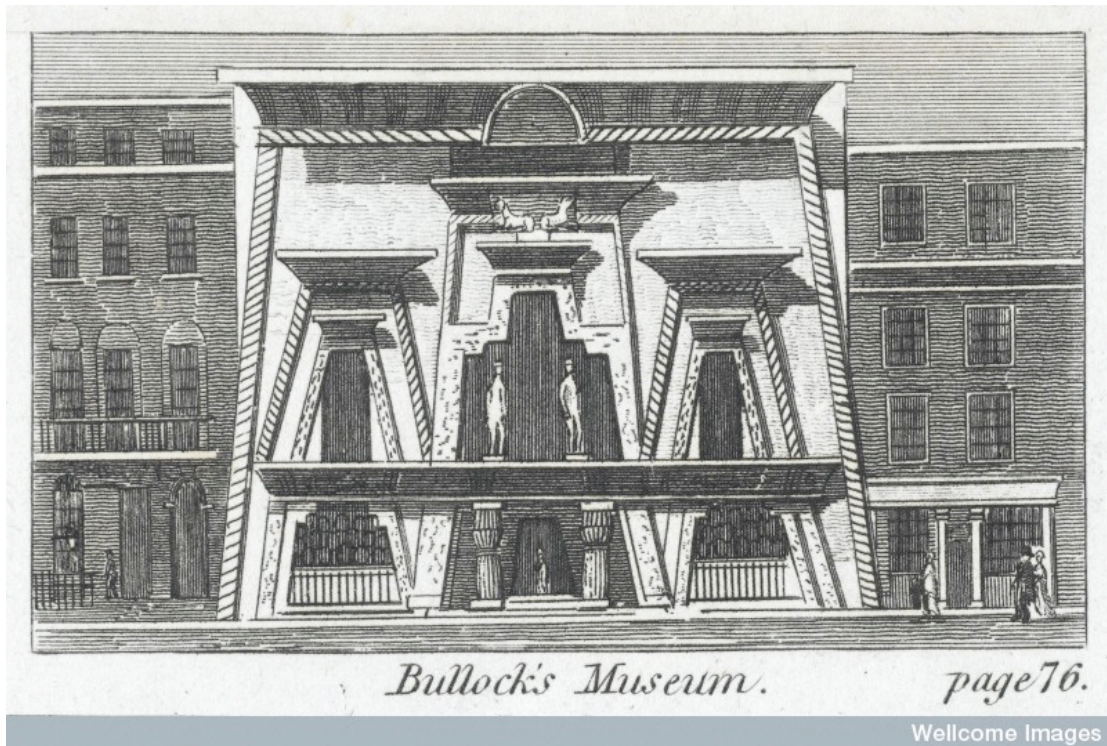


Figure 1. *The Egyptian Hall or The London Museum* (Wellcome Images)

On March 13 1845 the *Morning Herald* printed a review of a performance at the Egyptian Halls, the content of which bears remarkable resemblance to the ‘double-sighted phenomenon’ reported over a decade earlier. The ‘Mysterious Lady [...] apparently endowed with the faculty of second-sight’, turns her back upon the audience and yet remains able to ‘speak of everything that takes place with the most unflinching accuracy’. Unable to detect any deception or uncover any trickery, the reviewer concluded that this, ‘*clairvoyant* personage’ is able, through the application of some mysterious force, to see ‘without eyes’.<sup>124</sup> Elsewhere, *The Brighton Guardian*

<sup>122</sup> The popular mid-century French magician Henri Robin for example, included displays of second sight in a programme of tricks that also included producing live birds from a previously empty vessel, lifting a child painlessly via a single strand of hair and causing his assistant to disappear from the stage, see Geoffrey Lamb, *Victorian Magic* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 66-7. Samuel Dickson M.A., *The Principles of the Chrono-Thermal System of Medicine, with Fallacies of the Faculty*, into. W.M. Turner (New York: J.S. Renfield and Clinton Hall, 1845), pp. 175-6

<sup>123</sup> ‘The Double-Sighted Phenomenon’

<sup>124</sup> Egyptian Hall Advertisement, BL. Evans. 2501 (my italics)

praised the act as a fine example of stage magic, while both the *Norwich Courier* and the *Boston Transcript* compared the feats performed to historical accounts of witchcraft. A review printed by the *Medical Times* suggested another interpretative frame: ‘the attention of the medical world, which is engaged in discussing the merits of the higher phenomena of animal magnetism should be directed to the exhibition’, where they will witness a spectacular ‘feat of clairvoyance’.<sup>125</sup> Emerging from these readings was a distinctly heterogeneous model of seership, which was at once entertaining and scientifically edifying, mystical and contrived, constitutional and learned. An article in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* on the subject of ‘Scottish Second Sight’ published a year later, complained that the growing popularity of clairvoyant acts like the Mysterious Lady had a pernicious effect on a formerly respectable form of spiritual sight: it has ‘ceased to be a marvel, the preternatural powers, long supposed to be confined to Skye, Uist and Benbecula, are now demonstrated on the platform by scores of urchins picked up at random from the gutter’.<sup>126</sup> In its interactions with mesmerism the faculty appears, by this account, to have lost not only its geographical, cultural and linguistic peculiarity, but also its untutored quality. Recalling Samuel Johnson’s praise of second sight as an ‘involuntary effect’, of which those in possession ‘do not boast of it as a privilege, nor are considered by others as advantageously distinguished’, the Highland seer had previously been distinguished by his artlessness and the unprofitable randomness of the visions.<sup>127</sup> Now performed on the ‘platform’ and not by poetic mountain dwellers but by ‘scores of urchins’, second sight was in danger, *Blackwood’s* implied, of becoming another conjuring act among many.

In addition to illusionists and lecturers, bearded ladies and conjoined twins, visitors to the Egyptian Hall could witness live ‘zoological’ displays: in 1822 a Laplander family and live reindeer were installed among the faux-sphinxes and sarcophagi and three evenings a week a Mr. Catlin presented a ‘Tableaux Vivant Indiennes’, mainly composed of hired Cockneys.<sup>128</sup> These displays, whether composed of ‘genuine’ or theatricalised indigenous people, simulated exotic exploration, encouraged comparative ethnographic observation and offered up safely

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, (August 1840) 277

<sup>127</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775), (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1785), p. 89

<sup>128</sup> Altick, p. 276

contained spectacles of racial difference. The novelist Charles Dickens, reflecting on his visit to a family of Bushmen displayed in 1847, was most impressed by ‘the ugly little man’ who gave ‘a dramatic representation of the tracking of a beast, the shooting of it with poisoned arrows, and the creatures death’.<sup>129</sup> Acting out their daily tasks against a painted African backdrop, the Bushmen are presented as at once authentic ‘examples’ and dramatic representations. Master McKean, recently arrived from the remote regions of North Britain, ‘dressed in plaid’ and bestowed with the ‘second sight’, demonstrates a similarly theatricalised version of national and racial identity.<sup>130</sup> Recapitulating the conception of the Highlands as spatial and temporal repository of superstition, romance and paganism, the performing seer in London called up such imageries in the creation of a marketable act.<sup>131</sup> Yet just as the act itself provokes interpretive uncertainty—the *Literary Gazette* described it as a ‘very clever and unaccountable deception’, while the *Theatrical Observer* advertised his ability to ‘enlighten the City folks with his astonishing witchcraft’—the national identity framing the performance appears open to similar speculation.<sup>132</sup>

In a mock interview with the ‘Double-Sighted Youth of the Egyptian-hall’, in which he was called upon to extend his extraordinary powers to literary criticism in order to prophesize on ‘our present and future literature’, the success of the parody relied upon a sending up of MacKean’s somewhat hackneyed Highland persona. We are told that ‘much of our conversation was held over a bowl of whiskey toddy’; it is suggested that his double-sight may in fact be the ‘natural consequence of six large beakers of strong toddy’; he claims to wear the tartan of ‘The Gordon’ rather than McKean—an error that leads the interviewer to avow, ‘I could have wagered a trifle you were a Lowlander’; and his first ‘supernatural vision’ occurs after he has run away from school to lie idle in a ‘state between sleeping and waking’ in the heather.<sup>133</sup> Read

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<sup>129</sup> Charles Dickens quoted in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley C.A: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 45-7, who similarly comments that, ‘What is so extraordinary about Dickens’s statement is the implication that what makes the Bushmen human is not their ability to hunt but their ability to mime the hunt—that is, their ability to represent’ (47)

<sup>130</sup> ‘The Double-Sighted Phenomenon’, *Derby Mercury* 7 December 1831

<sup>131</sup> Master McKean appears as the defendant in an assault case two years later. As is reported by the ‘London Police’ correspondent to *The Belfast News-Letter* 9 April 1833, the boy, now named as ‘Thomas’, under charge at the ‘Bow Street Office’ was induced to perform a feat of second sight for a Mr. Halls

<sup>132</sup> ‘Sights of London’, *The Literary Gazette* (July 1832) 446, ‘Fashionable Lounges’, *The Theatrical Observer* (June 1832), 1-2 (2)

<sup>133</sup> Mark O’Gorman, ‘A Conversation with the Double-Sighted Youth of the Egyptian Hall’, *Monthly Magazine* (May 1832), 577-583 (577)

against the prophetic determinism of phrenology, wherein racial traits are produced and fixed by observable organs of the mind, the knowing enactment of Highland imageries—undertaken partly in collusion with an audience—suggests a means to re-interpret both second sight and national identity as equally performed acts rather than embodied characteristics.

### 2.3 MESMERIC TRICKS AND RELIGIOUS VISIONARIES

The comedic ‘Conversation with the Double Sighted Youth of the Egyptian Hall’, composed of the literary and theatrical gossip to which the interviewee is imagined to have preternatural access, provided a uniquely detailed insight into a moment of early-nineteenth-century popular culture. Of particular relevance was the connection drawn between this stage act and another form of seership being enacted in a popular London venue. ‘What is your opinion’ MacKean is asked, ‘of the Rev. Edward Irving and his gift of tongues and prophecy?’<sup>134</sup> A radical millenarian preacher and a friend of Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Edward Irving had begun his career in Edinburgh, before gaining national recognition around the time of MacKean’s performances at the Egyptian Hall.<sup>135</sup> In well-attended sermons and in texts such as *The Judgement to Come* (1823) and *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed: A Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse* (1826), Irving outlined his own vision of the approaching Second Advent. This radical millenarianism led to his eventual expulsion from the ministry of the Church of Scotland, after which his followers broke away to form the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church. Always operating on the fringes of orthodoxy, Irving fell further out of favour after one of his Regent Square sermons was disrupted by an outbreak of extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit.<sup>136</sup> Over the course of 1831 several female members of the congregation developed a variety of supernatural abilities, including spiritual healing, glossolia and automatic writing, and the sensational nature of these spiritual manifestations in collusion with Irving’s

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 582

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Carlyle dedicates a lengthy chapter of his *Reminiscences* (1882) to his friendship with the preacher. Irving also tutored a young Jane Welsh and was reportedly responsible for introducing Carlyle to his future wife. Irving was also subject to several Victorian biographies, the most notable being Mrs. Oliphant’s *The Life of Edward Irving* (1862) and Washington Wilks’ *Edward Irving: An Ecclesiastical and Literary Biography* (1854).

<sup>136</sup> Stuart J. Brown, ‘Irving, Edward (1793-1834)’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)



renowned oratory abilities, transformed the charismatic Scot into something of a celebrity.

The line drawn by the *Monthly Magazine* between the performances of Master MacKean and those of Irving is suggestive of an overlap in popular understandings of religious prophecy and the more mundane predictions of the platform clairvoyant. The reception received by these two Scottish seers also provides further reflection on how questions of nationhood might be said to have operated in relation to visionary experience. In his chapter on Irving, composed as the preacher was just beginning to make his mark on London society, the English essayist William Hazlitt complained that through ‘the grape-shot of rhetoric, and the crossfire of his double vision’ the preacher desired to ‘reduce the British metropolis to a Scottish heath’.<sup>137</sup> Here Hazlitt takes issue not only with Irving’s characterisation of London as degenerate metropolis and conversely the relegation of ‘religion to his native glens’, but also with his attempt to impose a peculiarly Scottish religious vision on an English audience.<sup>138</sup> When, describing Irving’s forerunner, Thomas Chalmers, as a ‘Highland-seer with his second sight [...] training his eyeballs till the almost start out of their sockets, in pursuit of a train of visionary reasoning’, Hazlitt made clear the cultural navigations at play in his critique.<sup>139</sup> The imposition of Scottish ‘prophetic’ fury on Britain’s capital city brings with it the excessive religiosity associated with prominent elements of the Kirk, but it also signalled the interjection of superstitious beliefs tied to the country’s past but flourishing still. Drawn was a connection between the metaphysics of folklore and understandings of Christian doctrine, here made problematically specific to the Scottish interpretations and manifestations of faith.<sup>140</sup>

This tension is best illustrated with reference to Hugh Miller’s autobiographical *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland; or, The Traditional History of Cromarty* (1834). The editor of the evangelical weekly *Witness* and a key participant in the formation of the Free Church in 1843, Miller was a prominent fixture of mid-century Edinburgh’s influential Presbyterian community. In *Scenes and Legends*, which

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<sup>137</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits* (London: Henry Colburn, 1825), p. 83

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* p. 87

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Chalmers, a professor of theology and political economist, was instrumental in the founding of the Free Church in Scotland and joined Hugh Miller and others at the ‘New College’ (the Edinburgh Divinity School) in opposing *Vestiges*. See Stewart J. Brown, ‘Chalmers, Thomas (1780-1847)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

recalled his upbringing in an isolated northern town, Miller provided an account of the development of his faith that underscores the dependency of the Kirk upon the 'wild scenes and wild legends' governing Highland life.<sup>141</sup> In a particularly striking example the author recorded how his great-great-grandfather, Donald Roy, underwent a remarkable religious conversion following the death of cattle, which he interprets as Divine intervention after he misses church on successive Sundays. Yet his sudden immersion in the Kirk did not involve a rejection of Cromarty folk beliefs, rather part of his notoriety as a Presbyterian elder stemmed from his avowed second sight, made manifest only after his awakening. Bracketing the religious sibyl with the second-sighted visionary, Miller asserted that no 'prophets of the Covenant were favoured with clearer revelations than some of the Highland seers. What was deemed prophecy in the one class, was reckoned indeed merely second sight in the other'.<sup>142</sup> In bridging the gap between old mythologies and new evangelicalism, lay-preachers and seers like Donald Roy imbued the teachings of the Scottish Kirk with populist mysticism.<sup>143</sup>

Second sight, which conflates the present with the future so that the effect is ascertained before its cause comes into existence, presented a disruption of linear temporalities, and the fulfillment of a second-sighted prediction suggested a teleological process by which the materials of reality are compelled to fulfill and make real that vision. The claims of the second-sighted and the prophesying of religious visionaries are thus alike in their power to unsettle historical narratives, representing both an alternative way of navigating causality and a means of introducing supernatural events unable to be assimilated. In *Scenes and Legends* Miller proposed a symbiotic relation, distinct from 'true religion', between 'enthusiasm' and superstitious thinking: 'one works miracles, the other inspires belief in them; the one predicts, the other traces the prediction to its fulfilment; the one calls up the spirits, the other sees them appear, even when uncalled'.<sup>144</sup> Both produced visions of history out of synch with dominant conceptions of causality and process, or as J. F. C. Harrison has it, it is one thing 'to study and preach on Daniel and the Revelation' but to 'act as though the last days were actually here was quite another. The former could

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<sup>141</sup> Hugh Miller, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland; or, The Traditional History of Cromarty* (London: Johnson and Hunter, 1834), p. 458

<sup>142</sup> Miller, *Scenes and Legends*, p. 160

<sup>143</sup> See Patrick Bayne, *The Life and Letters of Hugh Miller* (London: Stahan & Co, 1971)

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 159

be a mainly intellectual exercise [...] the latter reduced all questions to a few basic simplicities before the urgency of the imminent arrival of the Messiah'.<sup>145</sup>

Considered in relation to the historiography pursued by *Vestiges* and the progressive account of human development it offered up in collusion with phrenology, it is clear that the mechanics of prophecy acted in opposition to the ideals of linearity and perpetuity guiding these discourses. Though certainly remarkable in the vastness of its scope, *Vestiges* can still be read in the tradition of canonical works like Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) and David Hume's *History of England* (1754-62), in its production of history based on human action and natural law. Part of the evangelical backlash in mid-century Edinburgh involved a refutation of this developmental model. In his bestselling geological riposte, for example, *The Footprints of the Creator* (1849), Miller argued that as the fossil record revealed the co-existence of simple and complex forms, the theory of transmutation was intrinsically flawed. Instead, Miller argues that the progress of man and all other species reveals the direct intervention of a benevolent creator.<sup>146</sup> What was asserted here was the primacy of Biblical truth and supernatural intercession in shaping the historical record, against the omnipresent pretensions of scientific conjecture and forecasting methodologies.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, dedicated Adventist and Pre-Millennialist sects across Britain joined with American Millerite missionaries and mainstream evangelicals with millenarian sympathies, to re-configure the present as a prelude to the rapidly approaching Judgement.<sup>147</sup> Following a variety of year-day theories—in which days mentioned in Biblical prophecies are reconfigured as years or seven-year periods—Adventists recast everything from major socio-political events such as the French Revolution to the publication of 'ungodly' works like *Vestiges* as

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<sup>145</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarism 1780-1850* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1979), p. 208

<sup>146</sup> 'The Physical Science Chair', *Witness* (17 Dec. 1845), 2-3. Prior to the *Vestiges* controversy Miller had published his own vision of the earth's history in *The Old Red Sandstone: or, New Walks in an Old Field* (1841) which held that geology offered the strongest proof of God's design

<sup>147</sup> In her chapter, 'The Millerite Adventists in Great Britain, 1840-1850', Louise Billington note that the American followers of William Miller—who prophesied the Second Advent in roughly the year 1843—found 'most success in Scotland, where there was much interest in millenarianism among the Bible-reading Scots', *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* eds. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), p. 66

evidence of the coming apocalypse.<sup>148</sup> These millenarian prophecies were frequently accompanied by sudden outpourings of religious enthusiasm, some of which took the form of revivals. Such awakenings were, in the early nineteenth century, particularly well established in the Highlands of Scotland; with itinerant preachers like John MacDonald inspiring spontaneous outbursts of fervour in remote regions.<sup>149</sup> It was in the West of Scotland however, in small towns like Roseath, Row and Port Glasgow, that Edward Irving's controversial eschatology produced its first manifestations. Centred on the figures of Mary Campbell and Margaret MacDonald, two bed-bound and deeply religious women miraculously relieved of previously untreatable ailments, this coastal area became a locus for millenarian activity in the years 1828 to 1830.<sup>150</sup> Following their cure, Campbell and MacDonald made prophetic revelations, spoke in tongues, and moreover, discovered that they now possessed extraordinary healing powers of their own. The mass awakening these manifestations of the Spirit occasioned, led Irving, who was by then resident in London, to investigate the matter in person. This visit, during which the preacher was made aware of the influence of his own teachings upon the women, precipitated an important transformation of his doctrinal thinking. Where Irving had previously doubted the appearance of modern spiritual gifts on the grounds that these should appear only after the visible return of Christ, he was now not only endorsed but also actively anticipated miraculous signs of and direct communications with the Holy Spirit.<sup>151</sup>

Towards the end of the following year, the National Scotch Church in Regent Square played host to its own mass awakening. 'Last Sunday evening', the London-based *The Morning Post* reported on Wednesday 19 October 1831, 'one of the most singular occurrences took place' during the Reverend Irving's sermon. After finishing his 'oration' he informed the congregation that joining them 'within these very walls' was a woman who 'never spoke but when the gift of prophecy was on her' and thus that if she should speak 'every person should listen to her with the most profound

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<sup>148</sup>Samuel R. Bosanquet's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation: Its Argument Explained and Exposed* (London: John Hatchard, 1845) interprets Chambers' speculative natural history as sign of the approaching 'last times', which like the Edenic snake 'rears its head with human front and voice, and syren sweetness of address and invitation'

<sup>149</sup>David Bebbington, *Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 4-5

<sup>150</sup>Sue Zemka, *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Chistology and Literary Authority in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 44-50

<sup>151</sup>Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving* 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862)

attention'. What followed this remarkable pronouncement, the article continued, led pious attendees to flee 'such a scene of sacrilege and profanation', while the less virtuous 'rushed forward to have a nearer view of the frantic bedlamite':

No sooner had the Reverend Divine concluded this most extraordinary announcement than the ears of the congregation were assailed with the most discordant yells proceeding for the prophetess, who only wanted the hint to be inspired with the aforesaid gift, when she roared and bellowed in such a manner that the whole of the congregation were thrown into a state of the greatest confusion<sup>152</sup>

The woman responsible for this public affray was named at the article's close as '— Campbell from Scotland, who has been announced some time ago 'as a prophet in her own country'.<sup>153</sup> Respecting Diana Basham's characterisation of 'the 1840s' as 'among other things, *the* decade of female prophecy', Mary Campbell's reappearance in a London chapel and the sensational effects occasioned by her 'barely suppressed hysterical cry' suggests the emergence of a complexly gendered model of seership in mid-nineteenth-century popular culture.<sup>154</sup> Elsewhere evinced by the figure of Joanna Southcott, a religious visionary who believed herself to be pregnant with the new Messiah and who commanded a substantial following after her death in 1814, prophetic authority came increasingly under the purview of remarkable women.<sup>155</sup>

As the description of Campbell as a 'frantic bedlamite' illustrates, however, the social discordance occasioned by such awakenings, the abandonment of bodily control and surrender of the self to impulse and sensation, invited medical and psychiatric intervention and condemnation. For marginally positioned sciences like phrenology and mesmerism, historical and contemporary instances of religious 'unreason' provided test material for their developing theories of mind. In an 1841 edition of his *Constitution of Man*, for example, George Combe united the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, John Bunyan and Edward Irving in terms of a phrenological disposition to 'fanaticism'. Identifying in Irving, whose head he had managed to 'examine', the predominance of organs like 'Wonder', 'Ideality' and

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<sup>152</sup> 'Extraordinary Scene in the Scotch Church', *The Morning Post*, 19 October 1831

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> 'The Rev, Edward Irving and the Un-Known Tongue', *The Standard* 25 October 1831 and Diana Basham, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: MacMillan, 1992), p. 41

<sup>155</sup> See Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983)

'Veneration', Combe hypothesised that 'diseased activity' in these areas produced in the patient a 'belief in actual communication with Heaven'.<sup>156</sup> Under this explanatory framework religious prophecies, like the narratives of the second-sighted, were accounted for as the predictable results of a physical disposition that readies the individual for 'persuasion[s] of inspiration'.<sup>157</sup>

While phrenology, which confined its epistemological remit to the interrogation of character in everyday life, could dismiss such experience with relative ease, mesmerism's relationship to the entranced visionary was far more problematic. On the one hand, as Anne Taves notes in her study of American awakenings, animal magnetism offered 'a more convincing means of demonstrating the natural character of involuntary sensory phenomena than had been available to eighteenth-century anti-enthusiasts'.<sup>158</sup> Thus the mesmerised clairvoyant could be posited as a 'naturally induced analogue to the visionary' and the prophetic revelations occupying revivalists reduced to the result of magnetic fluid or the working of a superior will on the nervous system of a susceptible subject. On the other, as John Elliotson acknowledged in *Human Physiology* (1835), this proximity allowed skeptics to equate mesmeric influence with the 'prophecies of the Delphian priestess of Apollo' and the 'ecstasies of Dervishes and Santons, and of Shakers and Quakers, Irvingites', as comparable illustrations of how 'strongly fear or enthusiasm will work upon the brain and all the other organs'.<sup>159</sup> These polarised positions share common ground, however, in their elision or dismissal of the potentially disruptive content of prophetic visions.

Through the mid-nineteenth century a shared imagery of conversion and trance irrationality served as one of the most effective means by which to discredit mesmerism's claims to medical authority. An article published by the *Spectator* in 1843 pursued this line of argument in terms of a shared demographic and common lineage. The 'gaping crowds' who now attend 'public exhibitions' of mesmeric phenomena 'in search of excitement', were once enticed by the 'melodramatic displays of poor Edward Irving' and 'the gift of speaking in tongues', which was in itself only a 'phase

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<sup>156</sup> George Combe, *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects* (1828) 11<sup>th</sup> edn (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1841), p. 377

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 132

<sup>159</sup> John Elliotson, *Human Physiology* (London: Longmans, 1835) pp. 663-4

of mesmerism'.<sup>160</sup> Most damningly applied to Elliotson's experiments with the Elizabeth and Jane O'Key at University College Hospital in the late 1830s, the conflation of mesmeric delusion and religious enthusiasm re-asserted the pathology of disassociated or altered mental states. For *The Lancet*, the sister's rumoured membership of the National Scotch Church in Regent Square constituted a form of theatrical training. As a hostile witness to one of the UCH experiments gloated, 'One of the performers, it is said, was essayed at the chapel of the mad Rev. Irving: O'Key rose during the service, prophesized, and spoke the 'unknown tongues' so clamorously that the deacons were induced to lead her out in the midst of the congregation'.<sup>161</sup> Most damaging, however, was the interpretative disjuncture such an association established between doctor and patient. Despite their passive gestures and seeming deference to Elliotson, the sisters' connection to Irving's convulsing congregation imbued their clairvoyant abilities with meanings and significances uncontained by the physical paradigm their physician was attempting to establish.

While it is certainly not the case that clairvoyants like the O'Keys were party to the type of revelations that had assured Irving and Southcott substantial religious followings, their visionary experiences need to be understood as operating within the same broad tradition of inspired dreaming. Discussing Christian models of personality in the nineteenth century, Rhodri Hayward has suggested that 'philosophers, theologians and visionaries' were alike in celebrating 'the dream as a form of minor ascension, a moment in which the spirit escaped the constraints of the material world' and the 'ephemeral glimpses of the soul's transcendence' it appeared to offer.<sup>162</sup> The magnetic sleep, during which the sleeper was placed under careful observation and their utterances dutifully recorded, presented a unique site for the performance of spiritual authority in mid-nineteenth-century culture. Recounting his magnetic treatment of Friederike Hauffe, Justinus Kerner invoked a series of thresholds that mirrored the one established between sleeping and dreaming, and described his patient as 'in the state of one who, hovering between life and death, belonged rather to the world he was about to visit, than the one he was going to leave'. From this liminal position, the patient was empowered to access images and knowledge obscured to those 'whose inner life is overshadowed and obscured to the

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<sup>160</sup> 'Mesmerism', *The Spectator* 10 June 1843

<sup>161</sup> 'The Experiments of the Two Sister O'Key', *The Lancet* 15 September 1838, 873-877 (873)

<sup>162</sup> Rhodri Hayward, 'Policing Dreams: History and the Moral Uses of the Unconscious', *History Workshop Journal* 29 (2000) 143-160 (145, 146)

world-possessed brain'.<sup>163</sup> Frederike's clairvoyant travels, in which she encountered intricately structured worlds beyond our own and learned of a cosmological ordering system involving a complex system of words and correspondent numbers, were contingent upon her extreme bodily infirmity. Confined to bed and at one stage emaciated to a nearly fatal degree, it was the elision of corporeal strength that facilitated the dreaming soul's travels through time and space. This was symptomatic of the conditions of mesmeric influence itself, which insisted upon the necessary dominance of the superior will of practitioner over that of the subject. Replicated by British case histories such as William Reid Clanny's *A Faithful Record of the Miraculous Case of Mary Jobson* (1841), Robert Young's *The Entranced Female; or, The Remarkable Disclosures of a Lady, concerning another world* (1841) and Joseph Haddock's *Somnolism and Psycheism* (1851), this study established a model of peculiarly female seership strictly confined to the sickroom scene. Significant, then, were the ways in which transcendent visionary experiences, despite being couched in the language of spiritual essences, remain entirely bound to the discourses and imagery that besieged the Victorian female body.

What *The Night Side of Nature* offers our reading at this juncture is the means to think differently about the value systems that attend these mesmeric case studies and more broadly, the institution of the nervous and receptive female as a key experimental subject. For Crowe a clear divide existed and was illuminated by seers, which tied the concerns of men to the earthly and the everyday and insisted upon women's higher spiritual calling. 'The female ecstatic will more frequently be a seer, instinctive and intuitive; man, a doer and a worker; and as all genius is a degree of ecstasy or clear-seeing, we perceive the reason wherefore in man is more productive than in woman', a fact that can be attributed to 'the greater development of the ganglionic system in women'.<sup>164</sup> While it is possible to read this as simply recapitulating the familiar nineteenth-century division between masculine 'reason' and feminine 'intuition', for Crowe 'intuitive seeing' composed a significant spiritual and cultural technology for imagining and exploring the invisible. In the author's realist fictions, which are united in a shared discontentment with the limited scope of female action, socially credited intuitive powers are taken up as a means to heroic and

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<sup>163</sup>Justinus Kerner, *The Seers of Prevorst being revelations concerning the inner-life of man, and the inter-diffusion of a world of spirits in the one we inhabit* communicated by Justinus Kerner and translated from the German by Catherine Crowe (London: J. C. Moore, 1845), p. 57

<sup>164</sup> *The Night Side of Nature*, vol. 1 p. 34



independent action. This was most strikingly explored in *The Adventures of Susan Hopley* (1841), which sees a female servant work to unravel a complex plot, clear the name of her wrongly accused brother and bring several guilty parties to justice.<sup>165</sup> Over the course of this intricately structured detective novel—which presented an early example of the genre—Susan displays a natural aptitude for inspection and analysis: as a reviewer in *The Athenaeum* had it, ‘through all the intricacies of the story, she winds her way with preternatural ease—the Dea Vindex, who unites all its threads’.<sup>166</sup> Significantly, though Susan employs deductive techniques typical of the modern detective, her extended and perilous search for the truth is prompted and guided by a prophetic dream: ‘that strange and significant dream [...] which now, followed up as it had been by such singular coincidences, was daily, more and more, assuming in her mind, form, substance, and reality’.<sup>167</sup> Here the reader is presented with a uniquely *active* form of visionary sight, in which the details of a vivid dream provide a series of plot points to be brought about and worked over through the purposeful actions of a female protagonist.

Dreaming, in which ‘the relations of time and space form no obstruction’ and ‘things, near and far, are alike seen in the mirror of the soul’, provided an everyday example of the mind’s transcendental possibilities.<sup>168</sup> That dreaming may, under particular conditions, correspond to events occurring beyond the dreamer’s self or personal history, is a possibility explored at length in *The Night Side*, wherein ‘second sight and clairvoyance’ are presented as *techniques* by which the subject is able to view events ‘transacting at a distance, or that is to be transacted at some future period’.<sup>169</sup> An observational methodology based upon the efficacy of the dream as a route to knowledge unavailable to the waking mind, demotes the ‘everyday’ in favour of the superior revelations comprehensible only through an engagement with the invisible. This in turn produces what has been termed the ‘extra spheres’ of Victorian

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<sup>165</sup> *Susan Hopley* was generally well received and widely read. Dante Gabriel Rossetti provided pen drawings of twenty-four of the novel’s characters and it was adapted several times for the theatre. Despite this, *Susan Hopley* has not received a great deal of critical attention. Subject to only passing reference in Sally Mitchell’s *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women’s Reading, 1835-1880* (Ohio: Bowling Green Press, 1981) and in John Sutherland’s *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (London: Longman, 1988)

<sup>166</sup> *The Athenaeum* (January 1841), 94 quoted in Lucy Sussex’s ‘The Detective Maidservant: Catherine Crowe’s *Susan Hopley*’ which can be found in *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers*, ed. Brenda Ayres (Westport CT: Praeger, 2003), p. 60

<sup>167</sup> Catherine Crowe, *The Adventures of Susan Hopley, or, The Adventures of a Maid-Servant* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1841), p. 143

<sup>168</sup> *The Night Side*, vol. 1 p. 56

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53

culture.<sup>170</sup> As Wilburn contends, the unseen is therefore ‘destabilizing because it takes a belief system out of the domain of representations and institutions and places it instead in the domain of dynamic and dramatic personal experience and revelation’.<sup>171</sup> Considered in relation to the temporal navigations at play in pre-visionary or prophetic vision, it possible to extend the effects of these troublesome ‘extra spheres’ to the writing of history itself. Against the labour of the historian, which involves imaginary navigations, and in Michel de Certeau’s terms, ‘the arcane crafts of resurrection, animation, and even ventriloquism’, Crowe proposed dream and trance states as providing direct access to temporally distant events.<sup>172</sup> Discussing the creative inspiration uncovered in dreaming, Crowe lighted upon an expansive perspective, ‘how slow and ineffective is human speech’ she pondered, ‘compared to this spiritual picture language, where a whole history is understood at a glance’.<sup>173</sup> During her mesmeric experimentations Harriet Martineau experienced a comparable vision of history, ‘For one instance I saw the march of the whole human race, past, present and to come, through existence, and their finding the Source of Life’.<sup>174</sup> Both offered up versions of history in which temporally distant experience is opened up and reported first hand, and where it becomes possible to situate oneself outside of time in order to witness the unfolding of history. In certain states, Crowe assured her reader, ‘we are clear-seers’, and ‘the map of coming events lies open before us, [and] the spirit surveys’.<sup>175</sup> Past, present and future arrive to the dreamer, the visionary or the somnambulist unmediated and felt with the surety of immediate sensory experience.

When at a small social gathering in August 1847 Crowe inhaled ether with another female guest it was in the hope of gaining access to this type of trans-historical visionary ‘truth’. The Danish author Hans Christian Andersen was also present at this strange gathering and recounted later in his diary, ‘Dinner at Dr. Simpson’s, where Mrs. Crowe and yet another authoress (Mrs. Liddell) drank ether; I had the feeling of being with two mad people, they laughed with open, dead eyes. There is something uncanny about it; I find it wonderful for an operation, but not as

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<sup>170</sup> Sarah A. Wilburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006)

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88

<sup>172</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 67

<sup>173</sup> *The Night Side of Nature*, p. 56

<sup>174</sup> Harriet Martineau to Richard Monckton Miles 1845 quoted in Alison Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 223

<sup>175</sup> *The Night Side*, p. 57

a way of tempting God'.<sup>176</sup> As the demarcation between the proper and improper application of ether suggests, Andersen perceived something subversive in Crowe's use of the drug for non-medical and potentially hallucinatory purposes. The use of this particular chemical to bring about an altered state is notable in itself. After an American dentist, William T. G. Morton, began to publicise the anaesthetising properties of inhaled ether in 1846, medical supporters of mesmerism were forced to largely abandon what had previously been a *cause celebre* championed by James Esdaile in India: its effective use in surgical procedures.<sup>177</sup> This had provided medical mesmerists with a persuasive argument for its continued trial, and without it they were forced back into murkier questions concerning suggestion, consciousness and the will. Crowe's inhalation of ether a year after is thus doubly significant, not only was this recreational use already perceived as a dangerous misuse of medical material, but it was also motivated by a desire to achieve the same dissociative effects as those promised by the mesmeric trance. Reflecting on such experiences in *The Night Side*, the author valorised the excitement of the brain 'caused by intoxication', which has 'occasionally produced a very remarkable exaltation of certain faculties'.<sup>178</sup> Thinking once more about the scene described by Fanny Kemble, in which Crowe experiences the 'quasi-diabolical' effects of a mesmerist's 'lithe black hand', a change in the balance of power had clearly occurred. While the experience of the mesmerised patient is contingent upon the dominating influence of another, Crowe's inhalation of ether must be understood as constituting a form of self-experimentation defiant of social convention. In terms of how we choose to situate second sight in a mid-nineteenth-century context, this shift underscores the tension that developed between involuntary and voluntary models of enactment. The former found precedence in the re-iteration of the divinely inspired poetic seer, but also in the determinist tendencies of contemporary racialist and phrenological discourse. Against these positions, the interpretative blurring between stage magic and supernatural phenomena occasioned by performers like 'The Double-Sighted' boy, along with the charges of deception levelled at mesmeric subjects, increasingly pictured visionary powers as, however problematically, subject to the manipulations of the individual.

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<sup>176</sup> 17 August 1847, Hans Christian Andersen, *Dagbøger 1845-1850* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1974)

<sup>177</sup> Richard Liston, Elliotson's former colleague gloated: "Rejoice! Mesmerism, and its professors, have met with a heavy blow and great discouragement. An American dentist has used ether (inhalation of it) to destroy sensation in his operations, and the plan has succeeded..." *The Zoist*, (July 1848), 210-211

<sup>178</sup> *The Night Side of Nature*, vol. 1 p. 54

## CONCLUSION

In May 1853, Crowe once again joined Robert Chambers around the dining table of a middle-class Edinburgh household. On this occasion the evening's hosts were George Combe and his wife Cecilia Siddons, and instead of discussing a mysterious work of natural history the party entertained themselves by attempting to make contact with the spirits of the dead. As Combe recounted in a letter to the chemist Samuel Brown:

Robert Chambers and Mrs. Crowe took tea here the other evening, and then we had a ghostly session. Mrs. Hayden the medium being with us. While Mrs. Crowe and my wife catch the proper personality of the rappers and make them spirits, Chambers is blown like a feather not knowing what to think<sup>179</sup>

Arriving from New York's 'burnt over district' in the same year that Crowe published *The Night Side*, spiritualism or 'table-rapping' claimed to offer proofs of the soul's existence after death that were amenable to empirical standards of evidence.<sup>180</sup> Following the template set by the mesmeric practice of gathering round a table, sometimes holding hands in order to intensify the magnetic force, spiritualist séances were most frequently staged in private homes between small circles of interested parties. As the participation of Combe and Chambers illustrates, this new necromancy fed off the democratic investigative culture already instituted in Britain by the popular practice of phrenology and mesmerism.<sup>181</sup> An early convert to this new religion, Crowe counted the aforementioned Mrs. Hayden and the spiritualist historian Sophia de la Morgan among her personal acquaintances, and went on to compose rigorous defence of the movement in *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In* (1859). While she acknowledged in this text that 'table turning and rapping may appear insignificant operations', these manifestations were also capable, she asserted, of precipitating a revolution in nineteenth-century consciousness by 'convincing

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<sup>179</sup> Samuel Brown to Robert Chambers, 22 May 1853, Geoffrey Larken Collection, University of Kent UKC-CROWEBIO.F191889

<sup>180</sup> Mrs. Hayden or Maria Hayden was one of the first American spirit mediums to arrive in Britain See Katherine H. Porter, *Though a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1958) for a discussion of Maria Hayden's impact on British literary society and in particular, her influence upon the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning

<sup>181</sup> Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge, 1986)

mankind that the fact of spiritual influence in human affairs is both possible and true'.<sup>182</sup> What the after dinner séance demonstrated, was the accessibility of this new religion and the experimental visionary experiences its practice encouraged.

One year after the Combe's party, Crowe found herself the subject of a damaging rumour circulating in Edinburgh and London literary circles. Charles Dickens, in a letter to the Reverend James White, recounted with some merriment that:

Mrs Crowe has gone stark mad—and stark naked—on the spirit-rapping imposition. She was found the other day on the street, clothed in only her chastity, a pocket-handkerchief and a visiting card. She is now in a mad-house, and, I fear, hopelessly insane. One of the curious manifestations of her disorder is that she can bear nothing black. There is a terrific business to be done even when they are obliged to put coals on her fire<sup>183</sup>

Reportedly found wandering the streets naked after the spirits with which she was in communication granted her invisibility, news of this strange incident spread quickly among Crowe's acquaintances: Marion Evans (George Eliot) wrote to George Combe to express her condolences, 'I can imagine how closely it must affect you and Mrs. Combe who have been her friends so long'; Robert Chambers gossiped with Alexander Ireland over the 'condition of mad exposure' in which their former dinner guest was found; and Dickens dismissed her in a letter to another correspondent, as 'a medium, and an Ass' who was now 'under restraint, of course'.<sup>184</sup> After the incident it was alleged that Crowe went on to spend several months under the care of the alienist Dr. John Conolly, who reported in a letter to Combe that her mind had indeed given way to 'Spirit-rapping' and postulated that perhaps it was a sign of 'some Epidemic influence raging, affecting the brains of multitudes with vain belief, as in the Middle Ages with a propensity to perpetual dancing?'<sup>185</sup> Reported under the heading, 'More Insanity from Spirit-Rapping Fancies', the story of Crowe's alleged

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<sup>182</sup> Catherine Crowe, *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In* (London: T.C. Newby, 1859), p. 136

<sup>2</sup> Graham Storey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 285-6

<sup>184</sup> Marion Evans to George Combe 9 March 1854, UKC-CROWEBIO.F191889 Geoffrey Larken Collection, University of Kent, Robert Chambers to Alexander Ireland, 4 March 1854, W&R Chambers Papers NLS Dep/341/112/115-116 and Charles Dickens to Emile de la Rue 9 March 1854, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: 1853-1855*, ed. Graham Storey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 285-6

<sup>185</sup> Dr. John Conolly to George Combe 2 April 1854, UKC-CROWEBIO.F191889 Geoffrey Larken Collection, University of Kent

descent into séance-induced madness, was also picked up by the London-based *Zoist*. The article, credited to the publication's founder, John Elliotson, promoted the alleged incarceration of one Britain's most prominent authors in Hanwell Asylum as conclusive proof on the debilitating effect of spiritualism on the nation's 'superstitious' women.<sup>186</sup> Couched in the language of contagion and disease, Crowe's alleged naked ramble through Edinburgh was touted, by friends and enemies alike, as the natural result of her foolish adherence to a deluded system of belief.<sup>187</sup>

At stake in *The Zoist's* enthusiastic exposure of the alleged 'spirit-rapping fancies', was an awareness of the threat that this new contested science posed to mesmerism's already ambiguous claims to orthodoxy. In a letter of reply printed alongside a reprinted version of the alleged event, Crowe queried why, when 'the world has been ready enough to call you mad for your heterodox beliefs', Elliotson was so 'ready and eager to persecute others'.<sup>188</sup> Having found himself, for the first time since the scandal of his mesmeric experiments at University College Hospital erupted in the press, in concurrence with mainstream medical and religious thinking, Elliotson's sustained critique of spiritualism in *The Zoist* should be read as an attempt to distinguish his own practice from the supernatural claims of table rappers and mediums. One of the problems undermining this project was that modern spiritualism could be read as an extension of principles, potentials and techniques already inherent to iterations of mesmerism itself. As was made clear in an unpublished manuscript on *Mesmerism and Clairvoyance*, emanations from the séance could only be accused of finishing the work begun by the 'ecstatic' somnambulists of an earlier tradition, whose published 'impertinences' have 'hurt the character of animal magnetism far more than any frauds that have been detected or suspected at public exhibitions'.<sup>189</sup>

Concurrent with Crowe's experiments with ether, the French mesmerist and Swedenborgian Louis Alphonse Cahagnet had also attempted to transcend earthly boundaries—this time with the express intention of making contact with the world of spirits. Having tried mesmerism, physiological techniques, galvanic machines, opium and belladonna, Cahagnet eventually drank coffee laced with hashish and finally

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<sup>186</sup> John Elliotson, 'More Insanity from Spirit-Rapping Fancies', *Zoist* (July 1854), 175

<sup>187</sup> For an account of Dr. Conolly see Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993)

<sup>188</sup> Catherine Crowe to John Elliotson, *Zoist* (July 1854), 177

<sup>189</sup> Dr. R. R. Madden, *Mesmerism and Clairvoyance*, Wellcome Trust Library MS/75831

experienced the state of altered consciousness he sought. In this ecstatic condition he described a feeling of mystical oneness with the universe and perceived the burgeoning of clairvoyant abilities. Collating the results of his self-experimentation with the reported visions of various somnambulists, Cahagnet published his findings in *The Celestial Telegraph; or, Secrets of the Life to Come* (1851), in which he claimed to have, during ecstatic magnetic sessions, made contact and asked questions of the spirits of the dead.<sup>190</sup> Elliotson's condemnatory attitude to Crowe's 'spirit-rapping fancies', should be read then as a doomed attempt to define and reify the borders of his discipline against the encroachment of a new form of 'contested' knowledge. Two years after the Edinburgh scandal his periodical folded and by the time of his death in 1868 Elliotson had himself become an enthusiastic convert to the spiritualist cause.<sup>191</sup>

The varying degrees of participation of Crowe, Combe, Chambers and eventually even Elliotson, in spiritualism could be used to illustrate the easy traction between heterodox systems of thought in the mid-nineteenth century, or perhaps more simply the willingness of open-minded practitioners to investigate other unorthodox knowledge. Yet the virulence with which Crowe's friends and professional acquaintances denounced the author's foray into spirit communication suggested the transgression of a carefully maintained boundary. To return once more to the complex philosophical and cultural inheritance of the second sight tradition, it could be suggested that the continued insistence on its racial and geographical peculiarity—established by the discourses of folklore, phrenology and racialist theory—constituted an attempt to contain and quantify superstition. Considering again Lorraine Datson and Katherine Park's description of secular modernity as contingent upon the expulsion of 'credulity' from public discourse, it is possible to read the re-assertion of second sight as somehow reliant upon certain racial characteristics, religious conditions or delusive turn of mind, as attempts to maintain this division.<sup>192</sup> Elsewhere, visionary experiences like those associated with the Scottish Highlander, could be dismissed as the inevitable result of religious fanaticism

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<sup>190</sup> *The full title illuminates this, it reads The Celestial Telegraph; or, Secrets of the Life to Come, revealed through Magnetism; wherein the existence, the form, and the occupations of the soul after its separation from the body are proved by many years' experiments, by the means of Eight Ecstatic Somnambulists, who had eighty perceptions of thirty-six deceased persons of various conditions: a description of them, their conversation, etc., with proofs of their existence in the spiritual world*

<sup>191</sup> Lewis Spence, 'Elliotson, John (1791-1868)', *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (Montana, Kessinger, 2003)

<sup>192</sup> Lorraine Datson and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Press, 1998)

or as part of the natural operation of magnetic influences or fluids. In its sheer popularity, modern spiritualism, which offered believers access to the same forms of transcendent sight and similarly accessed the unseen, threatened to reinstate the 'supernatural' as a definitive sculptor of everyday experience. Recognising this, Crowe contended in *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In*, that spiritualism is only necessary because contemporary psychology was merely 'a name without a science' that has so far failed to match the epistemological advances of the physical sciences and as such 'of ourselves, as composite beings, we know absolutely nothing'.<sup>193</sup> The séance, for Crowe, was a route not only to self-understanding, through which the sitter gains a fuller understanding of their own history, but also a means by which to understand the interconnectedness of that history with the wider universe.

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<sup>193</sup> *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In*, p. 7



## CHAPTER THREE

### PRIMITIVE SPIRITUALISM: SECOND SIGHT AND ORIGIN MYTHS, 1860-1880

During the long sea voyage from England to Australia in 1852, the writer William Howitt dreamed of the house towards which he was slowly journeying, surrounded by a ‘wood of dusky-foliaged trees’, and on waking recounted these vividly imagined details to his travel companions. Arriving in Melbourne some weeks later, he experienced the remarkable fulfilment of his dream: ‘It stands exactly as I saw it, only looking newer; over the wall of the garden, is the wood, precisely as I saw it, and now see it, as I sit at the dining-room window writing, when I look on this scene I seem to look into my dream’.<sup>1</sup> In a letter to the *Spiritual Magazine* in October 1871, Howitt recalled how this prevision, in addition to revealing his brother’s home to him for the first time, also conveyed information regarding the specifics of the unemployment problem they would encounter on disembarking, far more accurate than ‘the news received before leaving England’.<sup>2</sup> Distinguishing this account of uncanny prescience from the countless others occupying the pages of newspapers, journals and dedicated ‘dream books’ throughout the Victorian period, was its dependence upon two usually distinct genres—the ‘true’ supernatural tale and the colonial travel narrative. The dream composed a kind of practical foreshadowing for the travelling author, providing a glimpse of the foreign world he would soon encounter—the details of which far exceed those garnered from orthodox communication technologies.

At the beginning of the 1850s, Howitt, along with two of his sons, Alfred and Charlton, spent a number of years seeking the family’s fortune in the goldfields of Victoria in South East Australia. The expedition was prompted by a failed publishing venture, *Howitt’s Journal of Literature and Popular Progress*, which survived for barely a year and left the family in a precarious financial position. Aimed at a working-class demographic, with fiction by writers like Elizabeth Gaskell printed alongside articles

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<sup>1</sup> William Howitt quoted by his daughter Anna Marie Howitt in her *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation: Biographical Sketches* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2010), pp. 235-6. First published in 1883 the text composes a double biography of her father and the German mesmerist and philosopher Justinus Kerner

<sup>2</sup> Anna Marie Howitt, *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation*, pp. 235-6

espousing political reform, the journal reflected upon the varied interests of one of mid-Victorian England's most productive literary couples.<sup>3</sup> Hailing from Quaker families and married in 1821, William and Mary Howitt pursued writing as a professional endeavour, as a livelihood as well as a 'calling'.<sup>4</sup> Regular contributors to Charles Dickens' *Household Words* and *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, the couple also published works of poetry, collections of stories for children, travel guides and translations. Following a dispute with a former business partner and the collapse of their journal, in 1848 the Howitt's were forced to declare bankruptcy and take lodgings in a less than salubrious area of St. John's Wood. Now £4000 in debt and all too aware of the unreliability of writing work, the male members of the Howitt family set out for Australia. After being reunited with his brother Godfrey, who had made the journey in 1840, William spent two years travelling between remote goldfields and exploring the wilds of the country. From research material gathered and letters written during the trip, he published two comprehensive accounts of public life in Britain's furthest colony: *Land, Labour and Gold; or, Two Years in Victoria* (1855) and *The History of Discovery in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand* (1865). These works imparted engaging accounts of colonial life: the peculiarity and beauty of the landscape, the difficulties presented by the harsh climate, the demography of the settlements and their troubled engagement with native peoples. In a similar vein to the text published by his other brother Richard, *Impressions of Australia Felix During Four Years Residence in That Country* (1845), Howitt's writings composed a rudimentary guide for those considering a new life in Australasia: the dangers one might encounter, the natural wonders to be enjoyed, the current standard of its infrastructures and so on.<sup>5</sup> Concomitant with these ethnographic imperatives, however, his years abroad also initiated the writer into another mid-century investigative culture: as was perhaps foreshadowed by his peculiar dream on route, it

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<sup>3</sup> See 'Howitt's *Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* (1847-1848)', in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* eds. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent and London: Academia Press and British Library, 2009), pp. 293-4

<sup>4</sup>Peter Mandler, 'Howitt, William (1792-1879)' and Susan Drain 'Howitt, Mary (1799-1888)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>5</sup> Richard Howitt (1799-1870), the middle Howitt brother, joined Godfrey on his trip to Australia in 1840 and returned to England in 1844, and is best remembered for his collections of poetry, *Antediluvian Sketches* (1830) and the *Gipsy King and other Poems* (London: Thomas Arnold, 1840)

was during his Australian adventure that Howitt was first introduced to the miraculous phenomena of modern spiritualism.<sup>6</sup>

When Howitt returned from his failed fortune-seeking trip in the mid 1850s, he found London absorbed by the strange goings on of the spirit séance: furniture levitated, musical instruments played untouched, entranced women spoke with the tongues of famous dead men and clairvoyants described journeys to far-off realms. More than a collection of entertaining parlour tricks, spiritualist movement offered believers a new religious experience based upon a re-opened channel of communication between the living and the dead. Given briefly, the origins of the movement are usually traced back to the curious rapping heard by Kate and Maggie Fox in upstate Rochester, New York in 1848. Having discovered an intelligent force behind the strange noises plaguing their home, the young sisters determined that the raps emanated from the ghost of murdered pedlar whose body was buried in the basement of the house, and moreover, that they were able to communicate with his spirit. Supported by the area's 'pliantly pentecostalist temper', news of these remarkable happenings spread quickly and with it many more discovered dormant mediumistic abilities.<sup>7</sup>

Initially taking the form of slowly rotating tables and unexplained movements, spirit communications were later realised by slate writing, trance mediumship and by the 1870s, full-form materialisation.<sup>8</sup> With the development of a progressively visual repertoire of ghostly phenomena, spiritualist belief increasingly grounded itself in the assertion of post-mortem existence as an *empirically* verifiable reality. This remarkable claim was one answered by extensive experimental investigation, which for some confirmed the co-dependency of duplicity and delusion in producing 'spiritual' manifestations, and for others produced surprisingly compelling evidence of supernatural or otherwise unexplainable agencies. Initially

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<sup>6</sup> An account of the Howitt family is given in Carl Ray Woodring's *Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1952)

<sup>7</sup> Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 1. See also Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1995)

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Brandon's *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1983) and Roland Pearsall's *The Table-Rappers: The Victorians and the Occult* (Stroud: Michael Joseph, 1972) provide detailed overviews of the movement's Victorian history

popularised in Britain by American mediums like Mrs. Hayden<sup>9</sup>—who we encountered in the previous chapter entertaining George Combe and his guests in 1853—the movement grew through the transatlantic exchange of individuals, texts and transcribed visions of the ‘Summerland’.<sup>10</sup> Though often demonstrated in the same sites of public display as phrenology and mesmerism—on the platform or in the Mechanics’ Institute—spiritualism constituted itself primarily via experimentation undertaken in private residences. By forming ‘home circles’ in domestic spaces around the country, believers uncovered talented mediums within the midst of their own familial and social groups. This non-hierarchical structure, under which any member of the circle could become the locus of spirit communications, appealed to self-improving and politically radical working classes from which a significant percentage of membership was drawn. Intersecting with strains of secularism, Christian Socialism, Owenism, Millennialism, temperance and the remnants of Chartism, the doctrine of ‘Universal Love’ preached by the movement promised religion without the elitism of the Church and the means to connect progressive social action with spiritual development.

In the preface to his *Tallangetta, the Squatter’s Home, a Story of Australian Life* (1857), a novel set in a makeshift community of gold miners, William Howitt deemed it necessary to defend the inclusion of two seemingly incongruous characters, ‘the spiritualist Dr. Woolstan’ and ‘Mr Flavel, the seer’. Given that the author’s avowed intention was to extend, in fictional form, the depiction of ‘Australian life and character’ begun by his sociological studies, the sudden interjection of the seemingly supernatural into this story required some elucidation: ‘It was in the far bush’, we are told, that the author ‘was first surprised by an exhibition of table-turning’ and more curious than this, is the presence of ‘an Australian spiritualist in London’ who is currently ‘astonishing daily circles of the most intelligent and unsuperstitious classes’.<sup>11</sup> How to reconcile these seemingly oppositional concerns, colonial adventure on the one hand and ghostly transmissions on the other, is part of the work to which

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<sup>9</sup> See Katherine H. Porter, *Though a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1958) for a discussion of Maria Hayden’s impact on British literary society and in particular, her influence upon the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning

<sup>10</sup> ‘Summerland’ being the afterlife, or rather, as was popularised by Andrew Jackson Davis’s *The Great Harmonia* (1850-1861) and *A Stellar Key to the Summerland* (1868) a realm that represents the pinnacle of human spiritual achievement. Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), also known as the ‘Poughkeepsie Seer’ was an American clairvoyant, whose conception of the ‘Summerland’ was greatly informed by the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg

<sup>11</sup> William Howitt, *Tallangetta, the Squatter’s Home: A Story of Australian Life* 2 Vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Roberts, 1857), vol. 1 p. iv

this chapter also attends. Read alongside another fiction inspired by the family's adventure, *A Boy's Adventure in the Wilds of Australia; or Herbert's Notebook* (1854) and the ethnographies pursued by *Land, Labour, Gold* and *The History of Discovery*, this account of life in the temporary communities springing up along the gold trail can first be understood as a contributor to the didactic narratives surrounding the final expansion of the British Empire into Australia, New Zealand and Oceania.<sup>12</sup>

Charting the exploration of remote regions 'where neither white man nor the black had ever come' and featuring an almost exclusively male cast of characters, these texts valorised a species of British masculinity forged in wild spaces far from the safe domesticities of England.<sup>13</sup> As is reiterated by the Howitt family biography—in the emigration and courageous fortune seeking of its male members—and then again in the novels created from the memory of this adventure, this imperial mythology created a wilderness for itself, emptied of native peoples and devoted to projects of masculine and national self-realisation.<sup>14</sup> These texts also speak to the network of exchange that existed between colonial observers and the scientific cultures of the metropole, in which the experiences recounted by travellers and missionaries came to compose a body of data placed in the service of anthropological theory. Alfred Howitt, who joined his father and brother on this expedition, became in adulthood a noted authority on the culture and social organisation of Australia's indigenous peoples: establishing in the co-authored *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (1880) and in his *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1904) something close to an early model of participant observation.<sup>15</sup> The Howitt family history is also then, in a sense, the history of nineteenth-century anthropological practice: charting transformation of the 'armchair' theorist dependent on colonial observers to the embedded fieldworker.<sup>16</sup> How to square this trajectory, one bound to the governmental, scientific and military

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<sup>12</sup> See C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002)

<sup>13</sup> William Howitt, *A Boy's Adventure in the Wilds of Australia; or Herbert's Notebook* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1855), p. 157

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness. British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

<sup>15</sup> Rev. D.J. Mulvaney, 'Howitt, Alfred William (1830-1908)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>16</sup> See Barbara Tedlock, 'From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41 (1991), 61-94 for an outline of this methodological history

mechanisms of empire, with the spirits raised by Dr. Woolstan, the previsions of Mr Flavel, or the uncanny dreaming of their author, is not immediately clear.

One approach to this difficulty entails a reflection on the types of communication that linked Britain with its representatives on the imperial margin. Published in 1857, three years after the family had returned home, the preface to *Tallangetta* reflects upon the geographical and temporal dimensions of its author's spiritualist awakening. Reminiscing on his introduction to the topic, the author recalls that in that period it had 'only advanced to stage of table turning' and that though 'Mr. Faraday thought he has completely laid the ghost of the question to rest' by attributing the phenomenon to unconscious muscular action of the sitters, spiritualism was now 'a new yet decided feature of social life'.<sup>17</sup> The practice is at present so entrenched in the humdrum of daily life, we are told, that within many families 'the daily conversation with the spirits of their departed friends [...] goes on as regularly with those still incarnate'.<sup>18</sup> The metaphorical resonance of what is literalised here—the possibility of direct communication with the spirits of the dead—is put to work elsewhere by Howitt in describing the exchange between Britain and her colonies.<sup>19</sup> Most obviously, the phrase 'departed friends' has the potential to denote not only those who have died, but also family members or friends who are simply not materially present—an absence that has particular potency in relation to the geographical expanse separating emigrants from their former homes. This painful distance can be bridged, Howitt proposed, by recognising the bonds, common experience and shared history, which serve to unite the two. Using Victoria as an example of what we are assured is a universal truth, he reminds his readers that the remote colony has a 'population [...] made up of overflowings of England' and that these 'overflowings have carried with them every possible theory and practice, every idea, feeling, passion, speculation, pursuit and imagination which are fermenting in the old countries'.<sup>20</sup> This paralleling of domestic and colonial concerns, elsewhere uncannily reflected in the author's premonitory dream, imagined the

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<sup>17</sup> *A Boy's Adventure in the Wilds of Australia*, p. v. Michael Faraday (1791-1867) credited with the concept of electro-magnetic induction in physics and the developer of practical applications for electricity, also turned his attentions to the phenomenon of table tuning in the 1850s. Having attended a number of séances, Faraday concluded that the motion of the table was attributable to the 'quasi involuntary action' of the sitters, rather than to the intervention of spirits. He made these conclusions public in 'Experimental Investigation of Table-Moving', *Athenaeum* (July, 1853) 801-3 and in a *Times* article, 'Table-Turning' 30 June 1853

<sup>18</sup> William Howitt, *Tallangetta, the Squatter's Home*, vol. 1 pp. v-iv

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* pp. v-iv

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. iii

sympathetic ties forged between individuals, families or even institutions across the seas as a network of affective transmission, that linked the concerns and traditions of the old world with the formation of the new.

The relationship between colonial and spiritualist exploration in the nineteenth century has been subject to recent critical intervention. In *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (2002), Roger Luckhurst contends that ‘scientific naturalism of the imperial metropolis held less authority on the periphery’, and from here opens up a discussion of how accounts of the supernatural might act as both a ‘passive shadowing of colonial power’ and also as a means to ‘disrupt the ‘propriety’ of imperialist relations’.<sup>21</sup> Although Pamela Thurshwell does not situate her inquiry in terms of colonial discourse and instead focuses on British literary culture, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (2004) is likewise concerned with the overlap between occult and technological modes of communication.<sup>22</sup> Writing in regard to an earlier context, Richard J. Noakes has explored the conceptual and metaphorical relations between telegraphy, and specifically the laying of Atlantic cable, with spiritualist contact. While the British public, Noakes writes, ‘grappled with mysterious spiritual communications’, the new ‘telegraph companies told them it was possible to use electricity to contact friends on earth’.<sup>23</sup> These studies are united, in spite of differences in historical and thematic focus, by an awareness of the space shared by emerging technology and occult transmissions. The inter-linkages these historians identify provide the basis for challenging what Noakes identifies as, ‘the asymmetrical, teleological and essentialist approach to so-called ‘fringe’ sciences’, by complicating any easy division between irrational subjects and rational scientific actors.<sup>24</sup> In what is partly an extension of the project pursued by these scholars, this chapter asks new questions of this relation: namely, how might we begin to think about the histories and imagined futures these uncanny networks negotiate. Here our concern is not with the conditions of colonialism as such, but rather with what the disciplines or discourses invested in that experience might have to say to the contours of domestic supernaturalism. Pamela Thurshwell has written of the way spiritualism

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<sup>21</sup> Rodger Luckhurst, ‘Telepathic Doxai: Knowledge and Belief at the Imperial Margin’ in *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 148-180 (156)

<sup>22</sup> Pamela Thurshwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 16

<sup>23</sup> Richard J. Noakes, ‘Telegraphy Is an Occult Art: Cromwell Fleetwood Varley and the Diffusion of Electricity to the Other World’, *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32.4 (Dec. 1999), 421-459 (422)

<sup>24</sup> Noakes, 422-3

‘creates contact across inaccessible time, with the dead’, while telepathy ‘creates contact across inaccessible space, with others outside of range of usual forms of sensory communication’, and it to these co-ordinates—temporal and geographical—that this discussion of Highland second sight now turns.<sup>25</sup>

To return briefly to Howitt’s oddly themed story of colonial adventure, in which second sight contributes its complex inheritance to the questions raised by table rapping spirits in the Australian bush. In *Tallangetta*, the relative novelty of Dr. Woolstan’s mediumistic powers find an uncanny historical lineage in the visionary abilities of Mr. Flavel, who ‘is the member of an ancient [Irish] family’ in which ‘there runs a peculiarity which, ever and anon, in the course of ages, shows itself in a species of second-sight’.<sup>26</sup> In the Dunellen’s, the ‘ancient barony’ from which the seer hails, the second-sighted perceive not only ‘phantasmal pictures of coming events’, they also ‘become frequently [...] aware of the spirits of the dead and hold communication with them, as with their living friends’.<sup>27</sup> This marks a fairly radical departure from the powers and phenomena that have so far composed to the tradition. While there existed a wide spectrum of ghosts associated with the possession of this faculty—ranging from a *tannasg*, the apparition of one already dead and a spectre of the living, a *tambasg*, to a *taslach* whose presence is only aurally perceptible and the *tartan*, the ghost of an un-baptised child—these were commonly interpreted as harbingers of death or enforcers of metaphysical justice. The assumption that such spectres might be open to friendly interaction developed with the rise of spiritualism. As Owen Davies comments, before this ‘the main reason for wishing to encounter the dead was in order to banish them rather than seek their spiritual guidance’.<sup>28</sup>

The inclusion of a second-sighted character in this narrative, then, indicates not only a shift in how this particular form of vision is constructed, but also the type of work to which it is being put in a new historical context. Moreover, the line of transmission pursued by Howitt, which sees Mr. Flavel travel from the Old World to the New, carrying with him an ‘ancient’ power that makes itself felt on the edge of empire, suggests a way of thinking about the changing social cadence of visionary experience in relation to genealogical and ethnographical imperatives. Second sight,

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<sup>25</sup> Thurshwell, p. 16

<sup>26</sup> William Howitt, *Tallangetta*, vol. 2, p. 26

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27

<sup>28</sup> Owen Davies, *The Haunted: a Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 71



unlike the forms of mesmeric clairvoyance we encountered in the previous chapter, connotes a particular heritage and its presence here must thus be considered through broader categories of nationhood and race, the domestic and the colonial. As such, this chapter is concerned with how the second sight tradition is pressed, by evolutionist thinking in various forms, as a type of inheritance: whether written into the biographies of famous mediums, as an example of where civilisation has progressed from or alternatively might journey to, or as a part of a living archaeology uncovered in the remote regions of Britain and the Empire.

This question is approached through separate but mutually informing lines of enquiry. The first concerns the impact of popular evolutionism, as expressed in both scientific and spiritualist accounts, on the imagery and discourse surrounding second sight as an indigenous tradition; while the second reads in the comparative methodologies of anthropology, ethnology and folklore the same geographic and temporal connections enacted by the second-sighted vision itself. The description of spiritualism given by the evolutionary theorist Alfred Russel Wallace in a letter to Thomas H. Huxley, as a ‘new branch of Anthropology’ best captures the duality guiding this discussion. Building upon the ambivalence of Wallace’s phrasing, where it is unclear whether spiritualism is being promoted as a subject *for* anthropology or as a new mode *of* anthropological investigation, this chapter seeks to underline the proximities between occult and scientific epistemologies in the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Roughly confined to the years 1860 to 1880, it charts ‘the golden age of spiritualism’ alongside the institutional and popular beginnings of modern anthropology, an intellectual tradition that transformed tales of exotic tribes and customs, superstitions, ghosts and myth into schematic visions of human development.<sup>30</sup> Where the 1860s were defined by institutional schisms between the Anthropological Society of London (ALS) and the Ethnological Society of London (ELS), the 1870s witnessed the development of something close to a cohesive discipline.<sup>31</sup> This is not to suggest that the polygenism that defined the ALS under James Hunt’s leadership simply melted away with the founding of the monogenist Anthropological Institute of Great

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<sup>29</sup> Alfred Russel Wallace to Thomas Huxley, November 1866 quoted in Malcolm Jay Kittler, ‘Alfred Russel Wallace, the Origin of Man, and Spiritualism’, *Isis* 65.2 (June, 1974) 144-192 (169)

<sup>30</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 70

<sup>31</sup> Efram Sera-Shirar, ‘The Battle for Mankind: James Hunt, Thomas Huxley and the Emergence of British Anthropology’, *The Making of British Anthropology, 1813-1871* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013) pp. 109-146

Britain in 1871, but rather that this established a new orthodoxy that was largely based upon evolutionary principles.<sup>32</sup> Explicated by texts like Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871), John Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilisation* (1870), Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (1869), Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), the theory of evolutionary gradualism and natural causation became a defining paradigm of the age.<sup>33</sup>

Transacted outside of biology, the metaphoric expansiveness of this theory gave over an account of social development that plotted the world's cultures and their peoples, past and present, along a scale from primitive to civilised. Largely homologous with imperial ideologies, such accounts usually identified Britain or Western Europe as having attained a higher degree of refinement than was typically evinced amongst the races over which they ruled. In underwriting the colonial enterprise, socio-cultural evolutionism generally understood the distinction between higher and lower forms of civilisation in terms of the progressive rationality or scientific achievement of the former and the unrepentant irrationality of the latter. Developed within new institutional contexts like the Anthropological Institute and the Folklore Society, the stories and traditions produced by a particular group were transformed into forms of specialised knowledge, which gave over insights into the history of a given people. Given the ideological weighting of this bifurcation, the resurgence of necromantic practices at the heart of the Empire arguably posed a threat to the surety of British racial and cultural superiority as expressed in nascent anthropological discourse. Spiritualist belief, like second sight and other 'superstitions', was frequently conceived of as akin to the 'primitive' religion and magic practiced by peoples at the imperial margin, a rebuke that located the credulous both temporally and geographically elsewhere to the privileged cultural space occupied by their home nation. Yet the habitual cross-articulation of spiritualist and anthropological principles, in a period of rapid professionalisation and popularisation, suggests a more complex picture. Rather than reject the theoretical basis of cultural evolutionism, spiritualists appropriated its language to produce alternative readings

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<sup>32</sup> James Hunt (1833-1869), a speech therapist and physician, who founded the Anthropological Society in 1863, published the *Anthropological Review* and spearheaded an increasingly unfashionable polygenic reading of race. See W.H. Brock, 'Hunt, James (1833-1869)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>33</sup>Accounts of the development of anthropological practice are given in George Stocking's *Victorian Anthropology* (London: Macmillan, 1987) and *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), Henrika Kuklick's *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology 1885-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and James Urry's *Before Social Anthropology: Essays on the History of British Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1993)

that divorced ideas of human progress from materialist goals. Described in the periodical *Light*, as a form of ‘transcendental anthropology’, spiritualism extended the study of evolution beyond the death of the body. Victorian proponents of spirit communication sought not only to establish the afterlife as a material and quantifiable reality, they also drew from biological models of species development and cultural evolutionism to describe its scientific significance.<sup>34</sup>

In spiritualist journals, newspapers and books, believers took up the lexicon of popular Darwinism to debate the progression of the spirit after death and the developmental significance of the extraordinary powers of perception being unearthed by the séance. As is signalled by journal titles like *Human Nature: A Monthly Journal of Zoistic Science, Intelligence and Popular Anthropology* and *Light: A Journal Devoted to the Highest Interests of Humanity both Here and Hereafter*, and by articles like ‘Evolution, Agnosticism, and Spiritualism’, ‘Hereditary Genius’ and ‘Origin of the First Man’, spiritualist discourse composed itself in relation to contemporary evolutionary cosmologies. This did not comprise a distortion of scientific theory to occult ends. Instead, developing fields of investigation and new observational practices were constituted in remarkably close communication with the ghostly emanations of the séance. This was observable at the level of both the individual, who might work in opposition to or in collusion with spiritualist thinking, and beyond to the practices, techniques and theoretical structures undergirding their disciplinary formations. Much critical attention has already been paid to Victorian spiritualism: it has been read as the site of working-class protest, as a vehicle for radical gender politics, as providing an alternative to narratives of secularisation or disenchantment and as a form of proto-modernist aesthetics.<sup>35</sup> Less has been written, however, on the movement’s interaction with evolutionary theory or anthropological practice. Important exceptions to this include Janet Oppenheim’s *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (1985) and more recently, Christine Ferguson’s work on the shared ideological spaces of spiritualism and early eugenics. In pressing the connections between discourses of racial and spiritual health/degeneracy, Ferguson identifies the means to challenge a ‘kind of wishful critical thinking that equates

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<sup>34</sup> *Light: A Journal devoted to Highest Interests of Humanity, both Here and Hereafter*, 29 July 1881, 354

<sup>35</sup> See Daniel Cotton’s *Abyss of Reason: Cultural Movements, Revelations and Betrayals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Logie Barrow’s *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge, 1986) and Owen’s *The Darkened Room*

unorthodoxy with subversion’, which has allowed spiritualists to be widely praised by modern historians as evincing ‘a morality far in advance of their age’, where in fact the séance tended to reproduce as well as transgress contemporary sociological discourses.<sup>36</sup>

This chapter is similarly invested in what new readings such an unmasking might open up and attends to the ways in which spiritualism, along with other iterations of popular Darwinism in this period, approached the power of prevision as a signifier of both advancement and regression, civilisation and savagery, race and nationhood. Beginning with the private investigation launched by Edward B. Tylor into spiritualism in the early 1870s, this chapter considers what the problematic negotiation of this fieldwork with the anthropologist’s published work on the subject might have to say to the ‘politics of method’ implicated in the cross-cultural study of superstitions.<sup>37</sup> Extended to modern spiritualism, which took up both textual argument and recordable evidence in support of its claims, my concern lies with what the specific claims made upon the second sight tradition reveal about the movement’s etiological strategies. Following on from this, the next section considers the power of second sight, in both anthropological and spiritualistic terms, as an historical object. Bolstered by the activities of folklorists, the Scottish Highlands were increasingly constructed as unique but threatened repository of superstitious belief in an otherwise civilised country. Read along evolutionary lines, this placed its inhabitants elsewhere in time and place, stalled at earlier stage and alike to other non-domestic ‘savages’ like the ‘aboriginal race’ Howitt encountered on his Australian adventure.<sup>38</sup> Before attending to the racist implications of this cross-cultural understanding of seership and how spiritualism might be seen to have subverted or colluded in their production, time will be given over to a consideration of the biographical function played by the second-sighted Highlander in Victorian spiritualist discourse. Its inclusion in the personal histories of several famous mediums offers a way into

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<sup>36</sup> Christine Ferguson, ‘Eugenics and the Afterlife: Lombroso, Doyle, and the Spiritualist Purification of the Race’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 12.1 (Spring, 2007) 68-85 and *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012)

<sup>37</sup> As explored in Nicholas B. Dirks, ‘Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive’, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: New York University Press, 1983)

<sup>38</sup> William Howitt, *The History of Discovery in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand* 2 Vols. (London: Longman, Green and Roberts, 1865), vol. 2 p. 202

thinking about the ancestries negotiated by the movement and the modality of the 'primitive' in its ideology.

### 3.1 TEXTUAL EVIDENCE AND EMPIRICAL PROOFS



Figure 2. Pitt-Rivers Museum Photo Collections 2009. 148.3

Captioned 'Spirit Photograph of William Howitt (in the flesh) and granddaughter (in the spirit)', this image joins photographs of 'Mr. John Jones, & a spirit supposed to be deceased relative', 'The Three Fox Sisters of Rochester' and a *carte de visite* of the medium Daniel Dunglas Home, glued into the pages of Edward Burnett Tylor's 1872

notebook now held by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.<sup>39</sup> In the photograph an elderly Howitt is pictured with a woman—perhaps his wife Mary—and what appears to be a child garbed in layers of white fabric. Composed through the same stiff, held-too-long poses that characterise Victorian studio photography, this faded image was the portrait of a much-desired family reunion. Understood as an isolated document, it gives insight into the ways in which this relatively new technology joined spiritualism in rendering the afterlife dramatically visible: departed spirits, prompted by the presence and prayers of loved ones, imprinted themselves on photographic plates. Spearheaded by the American William H. Mumler in the 1860s and popularised in Britain through the work of Frederick Augustus Hudson, spirit photography provided many believers with a means to both memorialise their dead and to demonstrate the objective ocular truth of materialisation.<sup>40</sup> The camera, an instrument seemingly divested of the constraining subjectivity of human vision, occupied a powerful position in the Victorian imagination as a mechanical arbiter of exterior ‘reality’.<sup>41</sup>

As such, spirit photographs, which revealed the contours of a ghostly presence unperceived by the eye but detected by the superior observational power of the camera, composed compelling evidence of spirit manifestation. Confined to the Howitt family, the photograph speaks of personal loss, the amelioration of that loss through heterodox religious belief and ancestral bonds that transcend the destruction of the body. Yet it is far from clear what members of the family are represented here and what familial ties are being maintained. In her *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye* (1882), Georgiana Houghton reproduces the same image but identifies the figures as those of William Howitt, his living daughter and a dead son.<sup>42</sup> In this instance the image is accompanied by an account by William Howitt of an 1872 visit to London, the family having by this point relocated to Tyrol in Austria, during which he engaged the services of Hudson

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, ‘Notes on “Spiritualism”’, Tylor Papers Pitt Rivers, 3/12 2009.148.1

<sup>40</sup> Louis Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler Spirit Photographer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Neil Matheson, ‘The Ghost Stamp, the Detective and the Hospital for Boots’, *Early Popular Visual Culture* 4.1 (April, 2006) and Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005)

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Massachusetts: MIT, 1992) and John Tagg, *The Burden Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988)

<sup>42</sup> Georgina Houghton (1814-1884) was originally a ‘drawing medium’ who believed that spirit guides provided the content of her art works, see Rachel Oberter, ‘Esoteric Art Confronting the Public Eye: The Abstract Spirit Drawings of Georgina Houghton’, *Victorian Studies* 48.2 (Winter 2006), 221-232

and obtained several photos of ‘sons of mine, who passed into the spirit-world years ago’.<sup>43</sup> In this letter yet another possibility is raised, as we are told that on viewing the photograph a reliable ‘lady-medium’ identified the figure of a ‘spirit-sister’ who had ‘died in infancy’.<sup>44</sup> What appears first like the post-mortem re-composition of a family mediated through the assured technological objectivity of the camera, is transformed through these multiple interpretations into something closer to the re-creation of that ancestral record in an atemporal and radically indeterminate space.

The Howitt family occupied a remarkably central place in the early history of spiritualism in Britain. Prolific and endlessly adaptable writers, William and his wife Mary published poetry, travel literature on Germany and Italy, multiple translations and children’s stories.<sup>45</sup> In addition to artistic and journalistic endeavours, like the financially ruinous *Howitt’s Journal*, the couple also took up campaigns against the evils of alcohol, slavery, vivisection, corn, game and poor laws, and their enthusiastic conversion to spiritualism from Quakerism should be read as partly an expression of this reformatory zeal.<sup>46</sup> Having taken an earlier interest in animal magnetism, in the 1860s and 1870s the pair devoted considerable industry to the exploration of spirit belief. Frequent séance attendees, friendly with several mediums and central to the capital’s core supporters, these literary professionals turned their prodigious talents to furthering the movement’s reach and influence. Discussing his contributions, the psychical researcher Frank Podmore proposed in his 1902 history that, ‘But for William Howitt, it is doubtful whether the movement would have secured either so early or so favourable a hearing in this country’.<sup>47</sup> Joining figures such as the mathematician Augustus De Morgan, the first British translator of Swedenborg J. J. Garth Wilkinson and Royal Physician Dr. John Ashburner, the Howitts formed a key component of the professional middle-class response to spiritualism in mid-

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<sup>43</sup> Georgiana Houghton’s *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye: Interblended with Personal Narratives* (London: E.W. Allen, 1882), pp. 39-40

<sup>44</sup> William Howitt’s account of his visit to Hudson’s studio is also reproduced in Fritz, *Where are the Dead? Or Spiritualism Explained* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1873)

<sup>45</sup>The couple published a collection of poetry together: *The Forest Minstrels and Other Poems* (1821) and later *The Literature and Romance of Northern Europe* (1852). Mary produced several well-received books of poetry for children (her most well-known work being ‘The Spider and the Fly’) and translations of Hans Christian Andersen and Frederika Bremer. During their time living in Germany William wrote, under the pseudonym of Dr. Cornelius, a series of works on the country’s social and political institutions

<sup>46</sup> E. Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970)

<sup>47</sup>Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and Criticism*, vol. 2 (London: Methuen and Co., 1902), p. 163

nineteenth-century London.<sup>48</sup> Distancing themselves from the freethinking radicalism of American spiritualists, these initial propagators drew on a combination of phrenological, mesmeric and Swedenborgian teachings in the formation of a new Christian eschatology capable of meeting the needs of rapidly changing social landscape. Joining texts like Sophia De Morgan's *Light in the Valley* (1863) and Emma Hardinge Britten's *The Facts and Frauds of Religious History* (1879), William Howitt's two-volume *History of the Supernatural* (1863) composed part of the movement's growing canon of intellectual and philosophically informed histories. Although Mary eventually renounced spiritualism in favour of Roman Catholicism in 1880, William remained a fervent believer until his death in 1879.<sup>49</sup> In articles published frequently in the *British Spiritual Telegraph*, *Spiritual Magazine* and *Christian Spiritualist*, he developed an encyclopaedic account of the movement's historical precedents and theological structures.

While the Howitts are far from representative, not many spiritualist believers published over one hundred articles on the topic or exercised such a marked influence on the movement's popular reception, the familial focus of their activities does speak of a wider trend.<sup>50</sup> Following the template set by the mesmeric practice of gathering round a table and sometimes holding hands in order to intensify the magnetic force, spirit circles were most frequently staged in private homes, between friends or family members. Over the course of their domestic experiments spiritual powers were often unearthed within household, with young female members usually the locus of mediumistic communications. In the case of the Howitts, both William and Mary discovered a talent for automatic writing, while their daughter Anna Mary displayed remarkable clairvoyant gifts and produced watercolour paintings under trance.<sup>51</sup> As Podmore recounts, during a sitting at the Hampstead home of the Swedenborgian J. J. Garth Wilkinson, the couple 'produced symbolic drawings,

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<sup>48</sup>In *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Janet Oppenheim includes Benjamin Coleman (a prominent spiritualist and at one point vice president of the British National Association of Spiritualists), Professor Nenner (Hebrew Professor at the Dissenters' College, St. John's Wood) and his wife (37)

<sup>49</sup>See Alison Twells, 'The Innate Yearnings of Our Souls': Subjectivity, Religiosity and Outward Testimony in Mary Howitt's *Autobiography* (1889)', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17.3 (2012), 309-28

<sup>50</sup>Oppenheim reports that the *Spiritual Magazine* published over 100 articles by William between the years 1860 and 1873 (38)

<sup>51</sup>Rachel Oberter provides an account of her life and her mediumistic abilities in 'The Sublimation of Matter into Spirit: Anna Mary Howitt's Automatic Drawings', *Ashgate Research Companion to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, eds. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah A. Wilburn (Surrey and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2012)



flowery, architectural [accompanied by] spiritual interpretations'.<sup>52</sup> Pressed further by Anna Mary's *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation* (1883), which recounts the history of the movement through the biography of her father, spiritualism emerges as a practice staged within and contingent upon the family circle. In the *History of the Supernatural*, the centrality of the Victorian family to spiritualist faith, the image of 'thousands daily sitting down in families and circles of intimate friends and quietly and as people of common sense, successfully testing those angels under their own mode of advent and finding them real', composed compelling evidence for the movement's essential goodness and utility.<sup>53</sup>

The yoking of the family home with morality in spiritualist discourse reflected a broader cultural division of public and private spheres that similarly valorised the religious authority of women and the improving influence of the domestic realm upon socio-political life. It is, the spiritualist publisher James Burns insisted, an essentially 'domestic institution' as mediums find the 'greatest degree of power' and that 'communications are purest' when they are 'presented in select and harmonious gatherings of with a well-ordered family is type'.<sup>54</sup> To accept unquestioningly this analogous relation, however, is to elide not only the important roles played by paid mediums and platform lecturers in propagandising the movement, but also the ways in which the experience of the séance refused as well as colluded in the valorisation of 'proper' domesticity. For though spiritualism still allows for an understanding of Victorian home as a sequestered space, removed from the amorality and bustle of the public world, the affective links established by the spirit circle also produced the domestic as a radically unbound site, open to otherworldly intervention and transformation. As is illustrated by the multiple genealogies captured in the spirit photograph, wherein wife can become daughter, a granddaughter can be mistaken for an adult son and infants who have existed only in spirit can materialise into solid beings, the affinities drawn with ghostly visitors authorised lines of connection that stretched beyond the spatial and temporal confines of the traditional family home.

Reading the Howitt portrait in situ, in the notebook of the founder of cultural anthropology and held in the collection of a museum built on the condition that this discipline was formally instituted at the University of Oxford, the strange connections

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<sup>52</sup> Podmore, vol. 2, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> *History of the Supernatural*, vol. 1, p. 219

<sup>54</sup> James Burns quoted in Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. 75

and displaced ancestries shaped by this spectral image take on significantly grander proportions. The photograph forms part of a small diary dedicated to the subject of spiritualism, in which Tylor recorded the details of séances he attended in November of 1872. Published for the first time by the historian George W. Stocking in 1971, the notebook provides a remarkably rich account of the spiritualist scene in London in this period: Tylor corresponds with the chemist and spiritualist investigator William Crookes, attends a séance organised by the automatic writer William Stainton Moses, spends evenings in dedicated venues like the Burns Progressive Library and witnesses the supernatural feats of the famous levitation medium Daniel Dunglas Home.<sup>55</sup> He also paid a visit to the Howitt family in Notting Hill and consulted Anna Mary, who was by then married and living in Chelsea, on how to best further his enquiries into the subject.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, the anthropologist's trips from Somerset to the capital were undertaken at the height of the movement's popularity in Britain, as table rapping began to give way to trance mediumship and spectacular feats of 'materialisation' began to dominate the public debate. A new generation of mediums, most famously Florence Cook and Mary Rosina Showers, channelled not only the voices of the dead but also their phantasmal bodies, whose kisses and caresses established a startling intimacy with the departed.<sup>57</sup> The sensational phenomena associated with this new form of communication provided believers with tangible evidence of the reality and remarkable proximity of the spirit world, while for sceptics the audacious transparency of this fraudulence spurred further enquiry.<sup>58</sup> Spiritualism's claims to offer increasingly tangible evidence for the existence of an unseen world were met by formal investigations hosted by the Anthropological Society in 1868 and the London Dialectical Society in 1871, as well as by the formation of dedicated organisations like the Ghost Club in 1862 and the Society for Psychical Research in 1882.<sup>59</sup> The contested phenomena of the séance elicited

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<sup>55</sup> George W. Stocking Jr., 'Animism in Theory and Practice: E.B. Tylor's Unpublished Notes on "Spiritualism"', *Man* 6. 1 (Mar. 1971), 88-104 and *Victorian Anthropology* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 191-192

<sup>56</sup> Pam Hirsch, 'Howitt [Watts], Anna Mary (1824-1884)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>57</sup> See Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room* and Marlene Tromp's *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State of New York Press, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> See William Hodson Brock, *William Crookes (1832-1919) and the Commercialization of Science* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2008) for a discussion of the chemist's experiments with Rosina Showers and Florence Cook

<sup>59</sup> 'Report on Spiritualism, of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society', (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1871), The Society for Psychical Research falls slightly outside of the remit of this discussion, but is taken in up in the following two chapters

responses from a broad range of disciplines, including physics, alienism, neurology, biology and as is illustrated by Tylor's small notebook, the nascent science of comparative anthropology.

This short investigation was undertaken a year after the publication of the work for which Tylor was to become best known, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (1871), an account that established its author as a key practitioner of the still heterodox theory of cultural evolution.<sup>60</sup> Spurred on by observations made during his travels in the Americas, from which he produced *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (1861), Tylor pioneered the comparative study of 'the condition of culture among the various societies of mankind' and defined culture as uniformly consisting of 'knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.<sup>61</sup> Despite being barred from further study on grounds of his Quakerism, Tylor was by the close of the century a key member of the British scientific establishment: a fellow of the Royal Society in 1871 and elected Keeper at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, he was eventually appointed as that university's first Professor of Anthropology in 1895.<sup>62</sup>

Central to the unique vision of history upon which this remarkable career was built, was his foundational doctrine of 'survivals' which proposed that though human society is characterised by its steady progress towards 'material and intellectual' civilisation, in its movement from one stage to the next it often carries with it the remnants 'of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved'.<sup>63</sup> Examples of these 'relics of primitive barbarianism' include children's games, popular sayings, strange customs and superstitions, the observation of which permit the adept observer to reconstruct a detailed picture of earlier cultural configurations. The table rapping and necromantic communications hosted by respectable homes across the country represented a particularly potent example of the 'survival and revival of savage thought, which the general tendency of civilisation and science has been to

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<sup>60</sup> Joan Leopold, *Culture in Comparative and Evolutionary Perspective: E.B. Tylor and the Making of Primitive Culture* (Berlin: Reimer, 1980)

<sup>61</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* 2 Vols. (London: John Murray, 1871), vol. 1 p. 1

<sup>62</sup> C. Holdsworth, 'Tylor, Edward Burnett' (1832-1917), *Anthropologist*, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

<sup>63</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 p. 15

discard'.<sup>64</sup> Yet the success of the 'survival' paradigm, elsewhere notable in the earlier work of the biologist Herbert Spencer and the ethnologist John F. McLennan, was that it provided a means of rationalising the reappearance of this 'irrationality' in modern Britain, without sacrificing the assurance of ever-progressing civilisation.<sup>65</sup>

In an article written for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1866, Tylor cited common ground with 'every ethnographer' when he described modern spiritualism as 'pure and simple savagery both in its theory and the tricks by which it is supported'; and warming to this theme in a paper delivered at the Royal Institute in 1869, he asserted that 'the spiritualistic interpretation of the alleged visions, and rappings, and writings, the belief that they are produced by disembodied spirits, belongs to the philosophy of savages'.<sup>66</sup> As part of his methodological object was to demonstrate 'the general likeness in human nature' revealed across evolutionary strata, the question of rational thinking in the 'lower' stages of civilisation composed a significant theme. For Tylor, early man found himself confronted by two problems, the difference between dead and living bodies and 'what causes waking, sleep, trance, disease, death?'; having examined the evidence at hand he concluded that unseen forces must be at work and characterised these as 'spirits'.<sup>67</sup> This animistic worldview composed a means then 'to furnish rational explanation of one phenomenon after another, which we treat as belonging to biology or physics'.<sup>68</sup> As society progressed towards an apex of scientific and technological development, however, these formative deductive techniques were rendered anachronistic and must be relegated from the status of fact to that of myth. Most controversially, under this progressive model of human history all religious belief is designated the 'antagonist of materialism', and thus essentially an obstacle to improvement. As George Stocking summarises, 'It was as though primitive man, in an attempt to create science, had accidentally created religion instead, and mankind had spent the rest of evolutionary time trying to rectify the error'.<sup>69</sup> This heterodoxy had obvious implications for all theological authority, as even the beliefs of the 'most enlightened Christian' are considered as at one with the 'rude savage of the Australian

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<sup>64</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, 'On the Survival of Savage Thought in Modern Civilisation', *Proceedings of the Royal Institute* 5 (1869), 522-35 (528)

<sup>65</sup> J.W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) pp. 240-241

<sup>66</sup> Tylor, 'The Religion of Savages', *Fortnightly Review* 15.8 (1866), 71-86 (83)

<sup>67</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, p. 428

<sup>69</sup> George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York and London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 192

bush', but the theory found a significantly less divisive target in the necromantic practices of modern spiritualism.

A number of historians, Peter Lamont, Jennifer Porter and Elana Gomel being among the most recent, have traced the traction of standards of verifiability and empirical proof between nineteenth-century sites of scientific and spiritualistic experimentation.<sup>70</sup> Though they come to different conclusions regarding its outcome, these writers share an interest in the 'crisis of evidence' precipitated by this exchange, either in terms of the damage done to empiricist epistemology by its inability to explain away evidence of supernatural phenomena or in the subversion of such paradigms by spiritualist practice. What Tylor's approach to the subject reveals is the need to bring this critical framework to bear upon other forms of evidence, not reliant upon direct observation but also at play in the discourse surrounding spirit manifestation: namely the library of travel literature, colonial biography, missionary reports, local folklore and antiquarian studies that comprised the resources of the 'armchair anthropologist'.<sup>71</sup> Before retuning to the contents of the 1872 notebook and the Howitts' spectral photograph, it is necessary to contend with the specific work performed by textual evidence, as opposed to directly observed experimentation, in both challenging and supporting spiritualist claims.

In *Primitive Culture*, the remarkable clarity of the 'survival' trope authorised a detailed system of classification by which the ethnographer was able to mark out the distribution of superstitions 'in geography and history', and identify 'the relations which exist among them'.<sup>72</sup> Under this comparative methodology the second sight tradition, regardless of its cultural and functional specifics, was reduced to an iteration of same 'primitive animistic theory of apparitions' peddled by the 'Red Indian medicine-man, the Tatar necromancer' and the 'Boston medium' alike.<sup>73</sup> Correcting an earlier supposition made by a Dr. Macculloch that second sight, 'has undergone the fate of witchcraft; ceasing to be believed, it has ceased to exist', Tylor insisted that

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<sup>70</sup> Peter Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal* 47.4 (2004) 897-920, Jennifer Porter, 'The Spirit(s) of Science: Paradoxical Positivism as Religious Discourse Among Spiritualists', *Science and Culture* 14.1 (2005) 1-21 and Elana Gomel, 'Spirits in the Material World: Spiritualism and Identity in the *Fin de Siècle*', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35.1 (March 2007) 189-213

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of the Victorian 'armchair' anthropologist see Henrika Kuklick, 'After Ishmael: The Fieldwork Tradition and its Future', in *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Site* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 47-65

<sup>72</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, p. 8

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141

with the advent of table rapping it is in fact now ‘reinstated in a far larger range of society, and under far better circumstances of learning and material prosperity’.<sup>74</sup> Not only are the powers of the ‘Highland ghost-seer’ buoyed by this new movement, they are also cited as a corroborating factor, along with the ‘teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg’, in precipitating the ‘spiritualistic renaissance’ in Britain.<sup>75</sup> Under this model, which concerns itself with historical accounts of uncanny prevision or missionary accounts of savage tribes rather than experiments undertaken in the séance, the reality or unreality of spirit communication was not of consequence: whether true or untrue these remain bound to a savage cosmology anachronistic to modern British life.

The relativism of this vision does not render it any way neutral: just as the séance served as a platform for the re-assertion of scientific authority and institutional boundaries, Tylor clearly had a professional stake in reading spirit communications as at one with primitive philosophy. The genealogy, for instance, drawn between the prophetic powers of the Scottish Highlander and modern ‘table-rapping’ phenomena, ultimately served to discredit the scientific claims of the latter by associating its practices with the persistent peasant traditions of ‘North Britain’ and their savage ‘doctrine of wraiths’.<sup>76</sup> To those who might be tempted, moreover, to treat the narratives associated with this visionary power as ‘actual evidence’ and in doing so potentially reverse the implications of this paralleling, the anthropologist cautioned that ‘they vouch not only for human apparitions but for such phantoms as demon dogs, and still more fanciful omens’.<sup>77</sup> The function of this equivalency is clear—to assign spiritualist manifestations their proper taxonomical weighting, not as worthy objects of careful observation, but as a superstition akin to many others around the world. Clearly this did not tally with how spiritualists viewed themselves, many of whom considered the advent of ghostly communications as a great advancement in human history, but the strategies employed to deflect such negative depictions did not always amount to a simple denial of these interconnections. Though it has been asserted that the movement largely heeded such advice and attempted to distance its enthusiastic empiricism from the ‘superstitious’ beliefs of the uneducated, this does not allow for the frequent incorporation of folk metaphysics—the rules, behaviours,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 130

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 406

powers and borders of experiential truth they delineate—into broader spiritualist schemas.<sup>78</sup> Rather, the tendency, as described by Janet Oppenheim, to draw ‘strength from indigenous cultural and anthropological traditions, in which religious faith and magic rituals were closely intertwined’, should be read as an attempt to meet studies like *Primitive Culture* on their own terms—to take up the language of anthropology in support of spiritualist belief.<sup>79</sup>

In a letter to Alfred Russel Wallace in 1866, Tylor contended that ‘when you see my facts compared with the spiritualistic books, you will have to admit to the great extent to which these books reproduce the known opinions of half-civilised and savage races’.<sup>80</sup> Though he observed an absolute distinction between his own work and that of spiritualist scholars, on the grounds that he recorded rather than endorsed the ‘opinions’ of savages, the defensiveness evident here was arguably attributable to the significant thematic overlaps that connected the two. In other words the taxonomic work performed by anthropology, through which ‘Culture may be classified and arranged, stage by stage in a probable order of evolution’, found itself echoed in the stylistic tropes and technical language of spiritualist histories.<sup>81</sup> Rehearsed in periodicals and dedicated newspapers, stories from ancient myth, accounts of the witchcraft trials of the seventeenth century, famous British hauntings, astrological and divinatory practices, folk beliefs and local superstitions were reformed through the new explanatory paradigms established by spirit communication.

In the 16 June 1883 edition of *Light* a spiritualistic reading of the second-sighted visions associated with the Battle of Culloden was given; in same paper the August edition corrected Sir Walter Scott’s incredulous interpretation of a death wraith in 1824; and stories of the Brahan Seer’s seventeenth-century prophecies were retold and re-imagined as remarkably attuned to the precepts of spiritualist theology.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>In their introduction to *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), editors Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurstwell reflect on the spiritualist’s ‘need to distinguish their beliefs from what was thought of as the ‘superstition’ of the uneducated and ignorant, whose belief in supernatural beings and events was untouched by the rationalism of educated opinion. Even those prepared to admit that ‘millions of spirits exist around and among us’ were anxious to distance their belief in the continued existence of the spirit from mere superstition’ (p.8)

<sup>79</sup>Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 27

<sup>80</sup>Edward B. Tylor to Alfred R. Wallace 26 November 1886, BL Tylor Papers, Adel 46339 ff. 6

<sup>81</sup>*Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, p. 6

<sup>82</sup>‘Visions in Connection with the Rebellion of 1745, and the Battlefield of Culloden’, *Light* 16 June, 277, ‘Excessive Lamentation for the Dead painful for the Departed’, *Light* 23 August 1883, 382-383 (383), and *Light* 11 October 1884, 415-416

These revisions and analogies repeated the rhetorical gestures of cultural evolutionism, but to oppositional ends: while Tylor reduced all faith to the workings of animistic thought, these spiritual anthropologists identified the unifying ‘truth’ revealed by mediumistic communications as the undergirding of all religious doctrine.<sup>83</sup> Though certainly keen to demonstrate the superiority of spiritualist theology, histories like Emma Hardinge Britten’s *The Facts and Frauds of Religious History* (1879), situated the practice within a wider preternatural schema constructed to support the claim that: ‘there is no part of human history, or human literature, which does not abound in demonstrations of this influence’.<sup>84</sup> These texts presented not only oppositional interpretations of progress, where the advancement of spirituality rather than rationality reveals a given society’s stage of development they also sought to privilege alternative genealogies. So instead of denying the connection between ‘spiritualistic theory’ and the ‘fanciful symbolic omens’ associated with the second sight tradition, such lineages became a means to access important historical testimony as to the veracity of séance phenomena.<sup>85</sup> Rather than a ‘revival’ of primitive thinking imposing itself upon the modern world, spiritualism represented a ‘universal faith’, as ‘old as the hills, and as ubiquitous as the ocean’.<sup>86</sup>

In a comparable fashion to earlier mesmeric studies like Catherine Crowe’s *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), discussed in the previous chapter, and Joseph Ennemoser’s *History of Magic*, which was translated from German by William and Mary Howitt in 1854, spiritualist anthropologies brought coherence to a mass of previously disparate testimony in order to redress the conceptual imbalance of the Enlightenment’s incredulous legacy. For Howitt, whose anti-clerical, *A Popular History of Priestcraft in all Ages and Nations* (1833), had critiqued the self-serving corruptions of the Anglican Church, it was the historical alignment of orthodox Protestant theology with rationalist philosophy that must share responsibility for having ‘pulled up the root of faith in miracle, and in the great spiritual heritage of the Church with it’.<sup>87</sup> In

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<sup>83</sup> A remarkable number of spiritualist histories were published in Britain and America from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Examples include John Ashburner, *On the Connection Between Mesmerism and Spiritualism, with Considerations on their Relations to Natural and Revealed Religion and to the Welfare of Mankind* (1859) Catherine Berry, *Experiences in Spiritualism* (1876), Thomas Shorter, *The Two Worlds, The Natural and the Spiritual: Their Intimate Connexion and Relation Illustrated by Examples and Testimonies, Ancient and Modern* (1864), Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse: Being an Exploration of Modern Mysteries* (1851)

<sup>84</sup> *History of the Supernatural*, vol. 1, p. 42

<sup>85</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, p. 405

<sup>86</sup> *History of the Supernatural*, vol. 1 p. 18

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68



the *History of the Supernatural* traditions of second sight, along with those associated with medieval mystics, Protestant Dissenters, Shaker visionaries, Swedenborgian teachings and the supernatural revelations of the Quakerism of his upbringing, constitute an historical counter-narrative capable of reversing Britain's spiritual impoverishment. In a chapter devoted to the subject, Howitt rehearsed the canonical literature of the second sight tradition, with Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* (1691) and Theophilus Insulanus's *Treatise on the Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (1763) subject to particular attention, with the express intention of forging a direct link between this established folk tradition and the modern spiritualist movement.<sup>88</sup> Identifying in the state of 'transport, rapture and sort of death' that accompanied the seeing of 'battles, wrecks and murders, seen beforehand', the hallmarks of 'magnetic influences', Howitt first proposes that 'the faculty of second-sight is, in truth, clairvoyance produced by the conditions of the mountains and the Isles'.<sup>89</sup> Expanding the scope of this equivalence, the author wondered in relation to the work of Theophilus Insulanus, how 'he in 1762, arrived at the same conclusion as the spiritualists of the present day, that the seers do not see the objects observed with the *outer*, but with the *inner* eye'.<sup>90</sup> This genealogical understanding of spirit possession had several rhetorical advantages. Firstly, the elision of temporal distance guaranteed a sense of precedence—the extraordinary claims of modern spiritualists were not a faddish affectation, but the expression of historically universal phenomena. Secondly, the specific line of hereditary traced from the Highland seer to the Victorian trance medium established a set of shared characteristics, so that 'the goodness of the life of seers, like that of the ancient seers and prophets, is the best proof of their mission'.<sup>91</sup> We shall consider what exactly these favourable 'characteristics' consisted of in a later section, but here it is enough to recognise how useful narratives of second sight proved to these histories.

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<sup>88</sup> The question of second sight was one that occupied Howitt beyond this text: in 1881 some material from an unpublished manuscript was published in a spiritualist journal. Here Howitt recount's Lord Talbot's famous experience of second sight and concludes by musing that 'These are certainly as strong proofs of second-sight as could be adduced; but it is scarcely to be imagined, to use the words of Coleridge, that they will be able to disarm the minds of clever people of our time 'of those feelings which preclude conviction by contempt, and, as it were, fling the door in the face of reasoning by a *presumption* if its absurdity', 'Remarkable Instances of Second Sight', *Light* January 1881

<sup>89</sup> *History of the Supernatural*, vol. 2, p. 442. See Chapter One for a discussion of Theophilus Insulanus, *Treaties on Second Sight, Dreams and Apparitions* (Edinburgh: Ruddiman, Auld and Company, 1763)

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p. 443

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* p. 442

Most simply, the wide-ranging and erudite surveys produced by writers like Howitt can be read as symptomatic of a broader negotiation of textual and physical standards of evidence. Though always insistent upon the valuable sensory proofs offered up by the séance, the movement relied heavily upon print media—books, dedicated journals, and newspaper articles—for the germination and dissemination of this testimony. Spiritualism’s paradox then is that, as Daniel Cottom has proposed, ‘its insistence on immediacy, on personal experience’ must be ‘supported by reference to a compromising medium’, and this in turn prompts exegetical manoeuvres.<sup>92</sup> In this necessary conciliation of the immaterial with the material, or experiential with discursive substantiation, spiritualist writers embedded the time space of the séance with resonances exterior to that temporal and spatial reality—so that traditions of religious prophecy or folkloric prevision become synecdochal of the form of spiritual knowledge now being rendered empirically verifiable. As the evolutionary biologist Alfred Russel Wallace proposed in the periodical *Light*, the insistent empiricism of spiritualist practice had the potential to transform ‘local folklore and superstitions’ into a ‘living interest’, as ‘they are often based on phenomena which we can reproduce under proper conditions’.<sup>93</sup> The powers of mind suggested by the premonitory narratives of second sight, previously interpreted by the romantic musings of travel writers or substantiated only by the scholarship of antiquarians, could now be tested, confirmed and correctly theorised under laboratory-like conditions.

The negotiation between direct and textually mediated knowledge posed certain methodological difficulties for Tylor’s approach to the question of spirit manifestation.<sup>94</sup> On the one hand he found himself disappointed, as having read around the topic and considered the testimony of believers he found after direct observation ‘the case weaker than written documents led me to think’.<sup>95</sup> The apparent manifestations of spectral agency to which he *was* witness provoked only incredulity and barely contained amusement. On November 8 1872, for example, he recounted a sitting led by ‘a pasty-faced, long-nosed, ugly creature’ named Miss Lottie Fowler, during which, ‘We joined hands, but her going off into a trance was interrupted by a

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<sup>92</sup>Daniel Cottom, *Abyss of Reason: Cultural Movements, Revolutions, and Betrayals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 55

<sup>93</sup> Alfred Russel Wallace, ‘Are the Phenomena of Spiritualism in Harmony with Science?’, *Light* 30 May 30 1885, 1

<sup>94</sup> See Lorraine J. Daston and Peter Louis Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007)

<sup>95</sup> Stocking, ‘Animism in Theory and Practice: E. B. Tylor’s Unpublished Notes on Spiritualism’, 99

grave absorbed old man sneezing violently, which his hands being held made embarrassing; and the medium, who had a sense of humour, writhed in agonies of suppressed laughter'. The comic disjuncture between these chaotic theatrics and what he terms, 'nauseous [...] spiritualistic goody' about 'spheres and spirits in other realms', only served to heighten the sheer irrationality of belief.<sup>96</sup> However, like the eugenicist Francis Galton, whose experience of the séance left him perplexed by 'the absurdity on the one hand and the extraordinary character of the thing on the other', the intensive investigation of the subject signalled a curiosity that transcended the pursuit of simple entertainment.<sup>97</sup> His unpublished assessment of the matter expressed, in part, the state of indecision that Jacques Derrida has characterised as part of the ghost-seeing experience, which always 'points toward a thinking of the event that exceeds binary or dialectical logic'.<sup>98</sup> While Tylor concluded his diary entries on the subject by asserting that 'seeing has not (to me) been believing', his overall assessment gestured towards the essential un-decidability of the situation: he cannot 'deny that there may be a psychic force causing raps, movements, levitations' but neither can he credit them without the presence of belief.<sup>99</sup>

Part of what this ontological fissure suggests is the construction and careful observation of a highly problematic anthropological subject. Problematic, not only because of the topic's hermeneutical slipperiness, but also because the methodologies engaged in its investigation were antithetical to those usually employed in Tylor's published work. At the beginning of the diary, he made reference to a séance he had attended with the materialisation medium Mrs Samuel Guppy at the London home of Wallace in 1867, and acknowledged that he had not yet heeded his host's calls for an empiricist approach to spiritualism, having instead traced 'its ethnology' and exposed its absurdities 'by examining the published evidence'.<sup>100</sup> For Wallace, a frequent séance attendee from the mid-1860s until his death in 1913, spirit communication provoked a dramatic revision of his earlier thinking on the question of evolution: where once the principle of natural selection, developed alongside Charles Darwin, was sufficient to account for the origins of life, the supernormal phenomena he

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 89-91

<sup>97</sup> Francis Galton to Charles Darwin March 28 1872 ' , quoted by Nicholas Wright Gilliam, *A Life of Sir Francis Galton: From African Exploration to the Birth of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 216

<sup>98</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 63

<sup>99</sup> 'Stocking, Animism in Theory and Practice', 100

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 93

witnessed led him to reconsider this position in relation to man.<sup>101</sup> Most fully explicated in his ‘A Defence of Modern Spiritualism’ for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1874, Wallace allied the common-sense empiricism of the séance with that espoused by scientific naturalism, and proposed further that the powers of mind unveiled by trance mediums underlined the need for evolutionary theory to apply itself to questions of moral and intellectual character. Wallace, whose pamphlet ‘The Scientific Aspects of the Supernatural’ (1866) had argued for the objective assessment of spiritualism’s claims and who had pressed the Anthropological Society of London to evaluate the American Davenport brothers in 1868, devoted considerable energy entreating his contemporaries to apply their critical training to the subject. This pleading, made in public forums and in private correspondence, had mixed results, with influential figures like Thomas Huxley, George H. Lewes and William B. Carpenter either refusing to attend or finding their antagonism to the movement only strengthened by the experience of brief proximity. Though far from acceding to his views on the subject, Tylor’s engagement with spiritualism was largely conducted in conversation with Wallace. As well as attending his first séance at his fellow evolutionist’s behest, there is ample evidence for Wallace’s continued influence: the spiritualism diary made reference to *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1875), in an unpublished notebook from the late 1890s Tylor had scribbled a reminder to read his ‘Annals of Modern Spiritualism’ in the *London Review*, and the two reviewed each others work on the subject through the 1870s.<sup>102</sup> The amicable nature of this exchange aside, there exists a gulf between the conclusions reached by these two thinkers, and while this is certainly attributable to a wide range of factors, it speaks most clearly to their methodological differences.<sup>103</sup>

Against the remote classificatory systems and hegemonic materialism of Tylor’s sweeping cultural comparisons, Wallace stressed, in both the field research recorded in *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) and in later spiritualist investigations, the essentialness of first-hand scientific observation. Discussing the divide between nineteenth-century ‘armchair anthropology’ and fieldwork, Peter Pels has suggested that they are best understood in terms of opposing models of scientific ‘visualism’.

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<sup>101</sup> Malcolm Jay Kottler, ‘Alfred Russel Wallace, the Origin of Man, and Spiritualism’, *Isis* 65.2 (Jun. 1974), 144-192

<sup>102</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, ‘Notes on “Spiritualism” and Tylor Notebooks 3/11 Box 3, Tylor Papers Pitt Rivers, 3/12 2009.148.1

<sup>103</sup>See Martin Fichman, *An Elusive Victorian: The Evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) pp. 139-210

While the first relies upon classificatory methods that flatten previously disparate cultures and practices into a ‘world of statistical equivalences, a world of homogenous time-space’, the second depends upon the possibility of ‘experimental rupture’, which can only occur through direct and unbiased observation.<sup>104</sup> What the experiences recorded in the 1872 diary underline is that despite the mocking ease with which Tylor seemed to discount them, the strange phenomena he witnessed in multiple London drawing rooms did trouble the observational regime staked out by schematic evolutionism—rather than a ‘survival’ modern spiritualism at times takes on the unsettling properties of a *revenant*. This was most simply illustrated by his adoption of Georg Ernst Stahl’s term ‘animism’ to designate the belief in spiritual beings.<sup>105</sup> Where Stahl, a German chemist and physician, had employed it in the eighteenth century to account for the action of the soul upon the vital forces of living matter, for Tylor it connoted something closer to a theory of religion.<sup>106</sup> With this etymological shift in mind he avowed, at the beginning of *Primitive Culture*, that the term ‘Spiritualism’ would better illustrate what is at stake, had it not the ‘obvious defect’ of being now ‘the designation of a particular modern sect’.<sup>107</sup>

While the talkative spirits and entranced mediums of the Victorian *séance* may offer a backward glance through evolutionary time then, they also seemed to assert themselves in the present by forcing ‘Materialist Philosophy’ to accommodate and account for their meaning. Thinking once more about the Howitt family photograph that illustrates the notebook, it is possible to view the multiple temporalities captured within this single image as usefully analogous to the complex positioning of modern spiritualism. On the one hand, the genealogy of the spirit photograph, which dissolves distance and time between family members, opens up a means to further complicate the ‘homogenous time-space’ occupied by comparative anthropology.<sup>108</sup> Yet on the other, the portrait constituted, for thinkers like Wallace, irrefutable empirical proof of spiritualism’s truth—a ‘thoroughly scientific witness’—if the camera recorded the image of a dead family member then their presence in the

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<sup>104</sup> Peter Pels, ‘Alfred Wallace, Edward Tylor, and the Visual Politics of Fact’ in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* eds. Peter Pels and Birgit Meyer (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 241-271 (264)

<sup>105</sup> Georg Ernst Stahl (1659-1734), German chemist and physician who conceived of the body as itself an animistic system, controlled and kept alive by the soul acting on and directed its mechanical processes

<sup>106</sup> Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 9

<sup>107</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 p. 424

<sup>108</sup> Pels, p. 264

scene was unquestionable.<sup>109</sup> In the following section we will consider what types of history or temporal modalities are at stake in this complex negotiation of verifying presence and expansive immateriality; how the physical encounter with an ancestral past staged in the spirit photograph, might complicate or undermine the forms of history making implicated in evolutionary theory.

### 3.2 SURVIVALS AND HISTORY MAKING

In an article on the recent history of ‘Table Turning and Spirit Rapping’, published in *Bentley’s Miscellany* in 1860, the author recognised the role of indigenous magical traditions in providing the groundwork for new manifestations of supernatural belief. This takes on a geographical dimension as Scotland is singled out as the porous and receptive site of the first invasion of American spiritualism into Britain. The ‘spirits’, we are told, ‘landed first in Scotland, the country of second sight [...] where adepts are still in communication with the Swedish visionary Swedenborg’, and following a sympathetic welcome there, ‘they were soon seen in England’.<sup>110</sup> Written from the perspective of a bemused and mildly incredulous outsider, this account established a native framework of beliefs—in second sight, faeries, brownies and wraiths—uniquely amenable to spiritualist precepts and grounded these firmly in northern soil. While it is hardly surprising, the article continued, that ‘this latest hallucination’ should find support among the notoriously superstitious Scots, it is disappointing that it should have originated in the ‘New World’, of which ‘we had a right to expect great things toward the emancipation and enlightenment of the human mind, and yet from which we have got as yet only table turning, spirit rapping and Mormonism’.<sup>111</sup> Balanced against the historical inevitability of the Scot’s inbred credulity, America is chastised for having squandered the fresh start afforded by colonisation. It is important that in defining the potential of the new against the outmoded beliefs of the old, Scotland not only signifies the latter, but also threatened the material progress of its southern neighbour by proximity.

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<sup>109</sup> Alfred Russel Wallace, *Miracles of Modern Spiritualism* (1878,) (New York: Arno Press, 1878), pp. 179-180

<sup>110</sup> ‘Table Turning and Spirit Rapping’, *Bentley’s Miscellany* 48 (July 1860), 568-578 (572)

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 573

Considering what ‘New’ connotes in this context or from whom the author expects ‘enlightenment’ and ‘emancipation’, raises questions regarding what is at stake in the relation between nationhood and revivals of the supernatural in the nineteenth century. After all it was in another ‘New World’ that William Howitt first encountered spirit rapping, yet the lines of communication he traced, from the Australian medium to the parlours of London, or between the fictional Irish seer and the wilds of the outback, sought to privilege the same cultural dialogue that is denigrated by this article. Attending to the relation between what George Stocking has termed, ‘domestic and colonial spheres of otherness’, this section will consider how evolutionary mapping produced second sight as the outcome of a developmentally stalled society, the remote Highlands and Islands, housed within the apex of Western civilisation.<sup>112</sup> Spiritualism, in the genealogies it privileged and in the alternative histories chalked out by the séance, both challenged and colluded in this powerful narrative.

The previous chapter touched upon how the polygenist racial typologies of Robert Knox and the condemnatory attitude adopted by prominent Edinburgh newspapers in regard to pleas for aid following the potato blight in 1846 reflected a widely felt desire to distance Scotland’s prosperous urban centres from the taint of an increasingly pauperised northern populace. The period covered here, 1860 to 1880, encompasses some of the greatest upsets in nineteenth-century Highland history. In 1882, with crops blighted once more and memories of the famine still alive in the collective memory, crofters around the Hebrides rebelled against their landlords by withholding rent and occupying land through force.<sup>113</sup> Inspired by the Land War being fought in Ireland, a Crofters Party was established and began to agitate for parliamentary reform. This uprising, as well as provoking the deployment of troops to the islands in 1884, also occasioned the convening of a royal commission to ascertain its cause. Headed by Lord Francis Napier, the investigation concluded with calls for a radical overhaul of the relationship between crofter and landlord, which pressed for the legal enshrinement of the rights of the former and the responsibilities of the latter. Viewed in a certain light, the Napier Commission’s findings appear to have advocated sympathy with the Highlanders and the cultivation of a better

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<sup>112</sup>George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York and London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 192

<sup>113</sup>Thomas Martin Devine, *Clanship to Crofters’ War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994)

understanding of their unique experience. This was marred somewhat by one of the report's central recommendations, that the 'facilities for emigration' be made available and attractive for those willing to take their families elsewhere.<sup>114</sup> In the only programme of its kind funded and managed by the government in this period, attempts were made to expel vast swathes of the Highland population from the British Isles. However this project was framed, as the result of 'accidents of physical nature' that had rendered the land unsuitable for farming or the unfortunate outcome of the 'historical development of the laws and customs of the country', the message it delivered was clear: portions of the population were surplus to the requirements of the imperial centre and would better serve as subjects at the imperial margin.<sup>115</sup> Just as the racist theories of the mid-century had explained and justified the socio-economic divide between Lowland and Highland, social evolutionism offered a new set of discursive tools through which to delineate and cement this difference.<sup>116</sup>

In the progressive vision of human culture propounded by Edward B. Tylor, the development of the race may be waylaid by anomalous revivals of 'savage' philosophy, but because 'nature is not full of incoherent episodes, like a bad tragedy', it ultimately marches on to a higher stage of civilisation.<sup>117</sup> The stadial model enabled the anthropologist, with varying degrees of success, to rationalise the spirit communications occupying London drawing rooms as only a brief resurgence of primitivism in an otherwise advanced and advancing society. Yet the potency of this paradigm depended upon its application to not only to cultural traits but to entire societies: where spiritualism represented the vestige of an earlier stage puncturing an Anglo-American present, elsewhere whole cultures remained stalled at a prior phase. This was made clear by a paper to the Royal Institute delivered in 1869, in which Tylor characterised the 'modern medium' as a 'Red Indian or Tatar shaman in a dress-coat', an admonishment that relied upon the assured backwardness of the group to whom the table rapper was being unfavourably compared.<sup>118</sup> This hierarchy depends upon an understanding of history bound to what the anthropological theorist Johannes Fabien has termed the 'temporal slope' of evolutionary thought, in

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<sup>114</sup>Evidence Taken by Her Majesty's commissioners of Inquiry into the Conditions of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Report with Appendices, Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty' (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1884), p. 10

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>116</sup> See Krisztina Fenyó, *Contempt, Sympathy and Romance: Lowland Perceptions of the Highlands and the Clearances During the Famine Years, 1845-1855* (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 2000)

<sup>117</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. p. 2

<sup>118</sup> Tylor, 'On the Survival of Savage Thought in Modern Civilisation', 524



which civilised Europeans occupy the *present* in relation to the delayed primitive Other. Through a ‘denial of coevalness’, Fabien argues, anthropology represents the observed culture as inhabiting a time other than and previous to the temporal space shared by the reader and ethnographer alike.<sup>119</sup>

Along similar lines, Gregory Castle has proposed that because cultural evolutionism ‘conceived of history in Hegelian terms as a progression from the primitive East to the civilised West’ it came to regard ‘primitive cultures as lacking the historical development that characterizes the civilised cultures of Europe’.<sup>120</sup> This particular understanding of time, though most rigorously applied in the study of non-white peoples, also impacted upon readings of marginal communities within Britain. Writing in regard to the disparity between the advanced industrialisation of nineteenth-century England and the recent ‘tribal’ history of the Highlands, the Scottish ethnologist John F. McLennan proposed that, in ‘a progressive community all the sections do not advance *pari passu*, so that we may see in the lower some phases through which the more advanced have passed’, an assertion that connects the northern populace with ways of life removed in both time and space from the country’s hegemonic centres.<sup>121</sup> As well as providing a coherent explanation for the industrial, economic and educational lag of the Highlands relative to their Lowland neighbours, this ‘temporal slope’ also helped to account for the persistence of ‘superstitious’ thinking in these communities.

In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor entreated his fellow ethnographers to ‘Look at the modern European peasant using his hatchet and his hoe [...] hear his tale of the ghost in nearest haunted house’ and from these ‘things which have altered little in the long course of centuries’ draw a ‘picture where there shall be scarce a hand’s breadth of difference between the English ploughman and a negro in Central Africa’.<sup>122</sup> Notable here is the equal weighting of the use of tools and the telling of tales in documenting the early condition of man, made visible to the anthropologist in the persistent customs of both domestic and colonial ‘savages’. With the establishment of the Folklore Society in 1878 and the publication of its official mouthpiece *The Folk-*

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<sup>119</sup> Johannes Fabien, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (Chicago: Columbia University Press, 1983), 11-12

<sup>120</sup> Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 103

<sup>121</sup> John Ferguson McLennan, *Studies in Ancient History: Comprising an Inquiry into the Origin of Exogamy*, ed. Arthur Platt (London: Macmillan and Co., 1896), p. 14

<sup>122</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 p. 6

*Lore Record*, the study of local beliefs and popular traditions was elevated from the realms of amateur antiquarianism to the world of institutionalised scientific practice.<sup>123</sup> Prompted by a suggestion made in *Notes and Queries*, this newly formed society bridged the gap between the encyclopaedic traditions long associated with the collecting and cataloguing of folk beliefs, and the observational strategies being developed within the Anthropological Institute. As is made clear by the address made to the London Society of Ethnology in 1870 on the subject of oral traditions, in which John Francis Campbell called upon those present to ‘take up this withered branch of ethnology, and treat it on scientific grounds, to see if it will grow’, and by Alfred Nutt’s description of folklore as ‘anthropology dealing with primitive man’ any attempt to discuss this discipline apart from its conceptual and institutional crossovers creates an artificial demarcation.<sup>124</sup>

This marks a significant development in the history of second sight, as in placing evolutionary thinking in close conversation with popular traditions this alliance was empowered to give insights into the ancient history and racial heritage of a people. In this foundational period, the Highlands of Scotland came to be identified as a key site for folkloric research, with collectors working largely from fieldwork, touring the northern reaches of the country and employing Gaelic-speaking locals, to record the last vestiges of a declining oral culture. Through works like John Francis Campbell’s *Popular Tales of the West Highlands, Orally Collected* (1860-2) and James Napier’s *Folklore: or Superstitious Beliefs in the West of Scotland* (1879), Scotland’s remote regions were re-iterated as repositories of pre-Christian cosmologies and supernatural agencies; where, as Tylor had it, ‘Folklore keeps up the wraith in Europe as part of the well-known Highland second-sight’.<sup>125</sup> Discussing the curation of the Crystal Palace’s ethnographic displays in the mid 1850s, Efram Sera-Shriar has proposed that these served as a ‘training site for researchers and potential informants’ where ‘visitors could learn how to observe the various ethnic groups on display at the department in a specialised way’.<sup>126</sup> The Highlands arguably served a comparable function, providing a geographically accessible proving ground for the methodologies

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<sup>123</sup> Prompted by a suggestion made in *Notes and Queries*, the Folk Lore Society counted G. L. Gomme, William Thom’s, Alfred Nutt, Edward Clodd and Edwin Sidney Hartland among its early members. The mouthpiece of the Society was the *Folk Lore Record* and subsequently the *Folk Lore Journal*

<sup>124</sup> J. F. Campbell, ‘Current British Mythology and Oral Traditions’, p. 339, quoted in *The British Folklorists*, p. 401 and Alfred Nutt, ‘Folk-Lore Terminology’, *The Folk-Lore Journal* 2.10 (1884), 311

<sup>125</sup> Tylor, ‘On the Survival of Savage Thought in Modern Civilisation’, 524

<sup>126</sup> Sera-Shriar, *The Making of British Anthropology*, p. 99

of comparative anthropology. As Richard Dorson has it, investigations were undertaken on the assurance that the ‘thought of early man could be recaptured in the Highlands, the Outer Isles, and the western counties of Erin where a two-thousand-year-old folk tradition still flourished’; where the traditional music, folk ballad, narratives, customs and beliefs of this developmentally stalled people provided a glimpse into the evolutionary past and provided a means to ‘recapture the mind of early man’.<sup>127</sup>

The problematic at the centre of this freshly institutionalised discipline, as identified by Malcolm Chapman, was that in defining ‘folklore’ as ‘on the retreat from the rational, the scientific, or the utilitarian’ its practitioners were motivated by the fear ‘that their field of study would soon disappear’.<sup>128</sup> Underpinned by a social evolutionary discourse that equated rationalism and utilitarianism with improvement, this materialist trajectory also threatened to obliterate the materials of the discipline itself. As an article in *The Folk-Lore Record* complained, in England where civilisation has reached its pinnacle, the ‘genuine popular tale’ is ‘not only is all but extinct, but has left behind it singularly few traces of its former existence’.<sup>129</sup> Further, as is made especially clear in the case of Western Europe’s ‘Celtic’ constituencies, the threat posed by the modern world upon traditional ways of life concerned not only the components of those cultures—ballads, stories and customs transmitted orally across the generations—but also the ‘race’ itself. Through the easy conflation of biological and cultural categories, the Gael or Celt was habitually understood along both national and racial lines. Captured in an earlier context by the description given in Ernest Renan’s *The Poetry of the Celtic Races* (1854), of an ancient race ‘expiring on the horizon before the growing tumult of uniform civilisation’, the Celt and his ‘Gaelic genius’ was routinely imagined as antithetical to the rational and mechanistic values of a scientifically managed society, and as such, on the verge of imminent extinction.<sup>130</sup>

This elegiac lament was taken up most famously in four of lectures delivered by the poet and critic Matthew Arnold at the University of Oxford in 1866 and published as ‘On the Study of Celtic Literature’ by *The Cornhill Magazine*. In these, the

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<sup>127</sup> Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 392-393

<sup>128</sup> Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croon Helm, 1978), p. 123

<sup>129</sup> W. R. S. Ralston, ‘Notes on Folk-Tales’, *The Folk-Lore Record* 1 (1878), 71-98 (72)

<sup>130</sup> Ernest Renan, *The Poetry of the Celtic Races*, 1859; rpt. (London: Felling-on-Tyne: Walter Scott, 1896) p. 14

native cultures and rich folkloric traditions of Britain's peripheral peoples were brought to bear upon a critique of the excessive materialism or intellectual 'Philistinism' of the English political centre. For Arnold, the 'undisciplined, anarchical and turbulent' Celt, who is always ready to 'react against the despotism of fact', provided an essential check on the rationalist energies of the Anglo Saxon. In what was partly a revolt against the extreme Saxonism expounded by his father, the historian Thomas Arnold, this study proposed the necessary intermingling of the races: so that the 'greater delicacy and spirituality of the Celtic peoples' be 'wisely directed' and 'blended' with the natural political leadership Teuton.<sup>131</sup> Despite being identified as a force capable of rejuvenating British culture, the scope of Arnold's project, 'What it *has* been, what it *has* done [...] as a matter of science and history', made clear that his concern with the Celt is largely as an object of anthropological curiosity, rather than a living people.<sup>132</sup> This is further underlined by his role as Inspector of Schools, which involved the enforcement of English over Welsh education, a linguistic erasure that emphasised once more his confinement of that culture and its creative production to the annals of history. 'The fusion of the inhabitants of these islands into one homogenous, English-speaking whole' is where 'the natural course of things irresistibly tends; it is a necessity of what is called modern civilisation'.<sup>133</sup> Discussing the Chair of Celtic Studies established by Arnold's lectures, Robert J. C. Young asserts that, 'Never was the colonial relation to other cultures in the nineteenth century more clearly stated: the force of 'modern civilisation' destroys the last vestiges of a vanquished culture to turn it into an object of academic study, with its own university chair'.<sup>134</sup> Thinking once more of Fabien's 'denial of coevalness', it is arguable that the newly institutionalised science of folklore made its subject by attempting to establish it as a subject for academic study, located or soon to become so, in the past.

Regarding Highland life and the second-sight tradition, this sense of historical erasure or eminent extinction is not specific to the period in question. From Martin Martin's claim in 1716 that the power was 'much more common twenty Years ago that at present; for one in ten do not see it now, that saw it then', to James Boswell's

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<sup>131</sup> See Richard K. Barksdale, 'Thomas Arnold's Attitude Toward Race', *The Phylon Quarterly* 18.2 (1957) 174-180 and Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1867), p. 154, 155, vii, viii

<sup>132</sup> *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, p. 15 (my italics)

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40

<sup>134</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (Oxon: Routledge, 1995), p. 71

lament in 1773 that he and Dr. Johnson had come ‘too late’ to experience the wild country and ‘antiquated’ way of life they expected to see, to the supposition made in *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1819) and quoted by Tylor that, in ‘ceasing to be believed, it has ceased to exist’, this visionary power and the peculiar social conditions that support it, were habitually forecast for annihilation.<sup>135</sup> This specific historical context distinguishes itself, however, in terms of a colonial relation that fixes its ‘other’ in an earlier temporal space, while simultaneously guaranteeing its authority as the proper producer and arbiter of historical ‘truth’. Significant here is the easy transposition of particular historiography onto the structuring of individual psychology, by which the failure of ‘savage’ peoples to adequately imbibe the causal sequences and patterns of evolutionary time serves to confirm their inferiority. In the first volume of Herbert Spencer’s *Principles of Psychology* (1876-96), for example, ‘mental evolution’ was measured by ‘the degree of remoteness from primitive reflex action’ so that those peoples with ‘no idea of a causal relation’, who pass from a ‘single passion into the conduct it prompts’ remain inferior to the self-governing and will-driven Englishman.<sup>136</sup> Stadial history found its mirror image in a privileged emotional regime characterised by the ‘hesitating passage of compound emotions into kinds of conduct determined by the joint instigation of their compounds’.<sup>137</sup> In other words, the psychology of the race was determined by how it interprets and records historical process.

This prioritising of linear understandings of cause and effect was extended elsewhere in George Henry Lewes’s praise of the philosopher Auguste Comte; whose understanding of human history as progressing through ‘the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive’ also greatly informed Tylor’s developmental reading of culture.<sup>138</sup> Writing in *Problems of Life and Mind* (1877), Lewes proposed that, ‘in relation to history I venture to say that no philosopher has ever laid so much emphasis on it, no one has more clearly seen and expressed the truth, that the past rules the present, lives in it, and that men are but the growth and

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<sup>135</sup>M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: A. Bell, 1716), p. 312, James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (1775) ed. Mary Lascelles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 103 and Tylor, ‘On the Survival of Savage Thought in Modern Civilisation’, 524

<sup>136</sup> Herbert Spencer, ‘Emotions in Primitive Man’, *Popular Science Monthly* 6 (January 1875) 331-339 (332)

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup>*The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* quoted in Timothy Larsen, ‘E.B. Tylor, Religion and Anthropology’, *The British Journal for the History of Science* 46.3 (September 2013) 467-485 (473)

outcome of the past', and it is this moral vision of historical causality, positioned in opposition to the 'illusory hypotheses' offered by theology, that Lewes superimposed onto the unified and non-pathological psyche.<sup>139</sup> Along similar lines, the Scottish philosopher and empiricist Alexander Bain posited an ideal linearity between past experience and present identity wherein: 'the unbroken continuity of our mental life holds together the past and the present in sequence that we term Order in Time', and through which the individual mind becomes synecdochical to a rationally ordered universe.<sup>140</sup> In her discussion of Eduard von Hartmann's *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869), which described the action of the will over the 'lower energies' of the nervous system as alike to a 'squadron of skilful riders and snorting steed by the will of the leader until the moment seems to have arrived for unchaining these energies by a nod', Sally Shuttleworth interprets these psychological models as sustaining a particular imperial social model: 'the conception of society as a harmonious system wonderfully coordinated by the guiding intelligence of its rulers'.<sup>141</sup> What Shuttleworth's analysis leaves open is the possibility that the 'primitive' refusal of this understanding of selfhood and historical sequence, might encode socially disruptive potentials.<sup>142</sup>

Though undertaken with the intention of demonstrating the ascendancy of spiritual rather than rationalist principles, histories like William Howitt's *History of the Supernatural*, frequently replicated the discursive gestures of cultural evolutionism: setting recent manifestations of spiritual agency in a developmental narrative stretching backwards to the ancient world and forwards to utopian imaginings of an enlightened future state. This seeming deference to temporal linearity was undercut, however, by the basic and highly contested conviction underpinning the movement. The belief the dead can materialise and communicate with the living produced a radically unorthodox version of the historical record. To return briefly to the Howitt portrait, it is clear that this image presented not only the re-staging of a family's history, but also the possibility of manifold genealogies: so that a lost granddaughter, dead son or unmet 'spirit' sister came to be embodied equally by the same white

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<sup>139</sup> G. H. Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind II: The Physical Basis of Mind* (London: Trubner, 1877), p. 67

<sup>140</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (New York, 1876), p. 534

<sup>141</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 188-189

<sup>142</sup> Roger Smith provides a useful account of the development of self-regulation and willpower as an emotional ideal from the Enlightenment onwards, *Inhibition: History and Meaning in the Sciences of Mind and Brain* (California: University of California Press, 1992)

robed figure. Part of what this multiple reading of a single image illuminates, is that despite their seeming deference to the empirical ‘truth’ produced by technologies like the camera, believers like the Howitts weighed the benefits of this observational regime against the types of knowledge that might be obtained through inner visionary experience. In their negotiation of the ‘objective’ photographic image and their ‘subjective’ interpretation of what this might depict, they asserted the potential of the spiritual to supersede the ‘real’. This in turn, presented an alternative method for navigating causality—akin to prophecy, second sight, and divination—which refused the conditions of evolutionary time.

Spirit photographs captured not only deceased family members, but also the spectral imprint on the present of history’s famous dead, so that the murky visage of John the Baptist or Joan of Arc might appear in the developed image. When the spirits of these long-dead figures began to surface in the present captured by a photograph and started to speak in domestic settings, the surety of historical authority was necessarily called into question. As Sarah Wilburn has it, ‘no longer did one who accepted spiritualism need to refer to the historical past for a sense of tradition or an iteration of law; one could simply ask the ectoplasm at home or read a document clairvoyantly’.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, these newly vocal historical actors did not often behave in the ways that cohered with their terrestrial activities, published opinions or biographical data. *The Future Life: as Described and Portrayed by Spirits* (1869), for instance, recorded the American medium Elizabeth Sweet’s communications with a number of famous figures including Joan of Arc and the more recently deceased Margaret Fuller, both of whom returned to confirm the truths of spiritualist theology from the other side. Over the course of her career, Sweet was also placed in communication with the spirit of Voltaire, who in addition to recounting the glory of the ‘spirit land’ also renounced his former atheistic convictions: ‘In the bustle and confusion of the outer life, how utterly so men forget the last great scene to be enacted on the visible stage, before they enter the portals of the unknown land [...] My life was one of deep yearning and unsatisfied longing. I was fierce and bitter, deep and grasping, in my search after the invisible wisdom, which was shut out from my hungry gaze’.<sup>144</sup> Returning in the form of ghostly revenants to amend or re-write the

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<sup>143</sup> Sarah Wilburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006), p. 131

<sup>144</sup> Mrs. Elizabeth Sweet, *The Future Life: as Described and Portrayed by Spirits through Mrs. Elizabeth Sweet* with intro. Judge J.W. Edmonds 6<sup>th</sup> edn. (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1878), p. 359

record, these temporary resurrections called into question the assumed importance of history itself, reflecting instead upon ideals of mystical synchronicity and repetition, as well as prophetic, millenarian or second-sighted rupture or disjuncture.

In an article mocking Alfred Russel Wallace's recent conversion to the spiritualist cause, the *Anthropological Review* wondered in 1867 if the views held by him 'on the past and coming unity of mankind' were 'communicated to him by some kind departed spirit, perhaps that of the "first man"'.<sup>145</sup> Though obviously not intended as a serious consideration of anthropological practice, this proposed methodology does reflect upon some of the unexpected resonances between the timelessness of the séance and the trans-historical negotiations of evolutionism. Is Tylor's assertion, given in a paper on the use of stone tools among the Tasmanian people, that 'the condition of modern savages illustrates the condition of ancient Stone Age peoples', so different from the folly of which Wallace is accused?<sup>146</sup> Viewed in a certain light, anthropology's 'super vision', to adopt Peter Pels's term once more, appears to promote the same kind of intimacy with history and historical actors as that promised by spirit communication.<sup>147</sup> In an essay by Thomas Huxley titled, 'The Method of Zadig: Retrospective Prophecy as a Function of Science' (1880), the evolutionary biologist discussed Voltaire's fabled Babylonian philosopher and his method of divination through the reading of subtle clues, which allowed him to deduce detailed knowledge of events.<sup>148</sup> In doing so Huxley wedded his epistemology to a disenchanted form of seership, whereby scientific reasoning composed 'the apprehension of that which lies outside our sphere of immediate knowledge'.<sup>149</sup> As such deep time can be accessed in the present through a process of 'back-telling', whereby the same natural laws that made the geological record intelligible could be applied to the reconstruction 'in the human imagination of events which have vanished and ceased to be'.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> 'Science and Spiritualism', *The Anthropological Review* 5 (1867) 242-243 (242)

<sup>146</sup> Tylor, 'On the Tasmanians as Representatives of Palaeolithic Man', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 23 (1894) 141-152 (152)

<sup>147</sup> Peter Pels, 'Alfred Wallace, Edward Tylor, and the Visual Politics of Fact' in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* eds. Peter Pels and Birgit Meyer (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 241-271

<sup>148</sup> Thomas H. Huxley, 'The Method of Zadig: Retrospective Prophecy as a Function of Science', *Nineteenth Century* 7 (1880) 929-940; reprinted in *Science and the Hebrew Tradition* (New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1896) pp. 1-23

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27. See Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009)



In *The Soul of Things: Psychometric Experiments for Re-living History* (1863) the geologist William Denton proposed a means of directly accessing deep time through the history contained within unearthed fossils and archaeological remains. Employing the talents of seers to read and recount the impressions experienced by an object, Denton proposed that it was possible to re-live history, and as Shane McCorristine writes, these ‘elective hallucinations were seen as utilitarian and almost messianic in their abilities to transform the state of knowledge, quite literally from the ground up’.<sup>151</sup> Denton’s psychometrics, though certainly heterodox, expounded a view of geology’s broad utility that is not entirely out of step with evolutionary thought. His assertion that ‘the meanest boulder by the roadside would fill more volumes than all our libraries contain’<sup>152</sup>, found an echo in the novelist George Eliot’s characterisation of a ‘correct generalisation’ as giving ‘significance to the smallest detail, just as the great inductions of geology demonstrate in every pebble the working of laws by which the earth has become adapted for the habitation of man’.<sup>153</sup> Common to both is the characterisation of the geological fragment as possessed of divinatory potential, whereby a correct reading of its past life—clairvoyantly or scientifically—leads the trained observer to predict its probable future course. These correlations are highlighted with the intention of both troubling some of the intellectual divisions established at the beginning of this section, and also to draw attention to the supernatural possibilities or non-linear temporalities shared by orthodox science and its spiritualist antithesis. Evolution engages in similar acts of divination, in seeking to forecast probable progressions and developments it is a scientific theory imbued with futurity.

For Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man* (1871) evolutionary time was a dual condition, one that encouraged both historical and utopian visions, which reflected upon the nature of man who ‘owing to his condition of mind [...] cannot avoid

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<sup>151</sup> Shane McCorristine, *Specters of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 96-97

<sup>152</sup> William Denton, *The Soul of Things: Psychometric Experiments for Re-living History* (1863), (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1988), p. 50. In Denton’s entry in Lewis Spence’s *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, Mrs. Denton is identified as her husband’s key experimental subject. On touching a pebble of limestone, Mrs. Denton is reported to have said ‘I feel as if I were below an immense body of water so deep that I cannot see down through it, and yet it seems that I could see upward through it for miles’, and from descriptions such as these Denton concluded that ‘From the first dawn of light upon this infant globe [...] Nature has been photographing every moment!’ (229)

<sup>153</sup> George Eliot, ‘The Progress of the Intellect’ cited in Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make Believe of a Beginning*, p. 13

looking both backward and forward'.<sup>154</sup> In George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) the co-dependence of the vestigial and the imminent assumed an uncanny resonance. Ostensibly realist in form, Eliot's tale of moral corruption and unearthed ancestries is one shot through with acts of clairvoyance, divination, supernatural forecasting and religious prophesying. The faculty of second sight, attributed to several individuals and offered as an explanation for numerous strange coincidental instances, occupies a complex space in this novel. In the first instance, it encodes, as Nicholas Royle has also observed, the promise of ill fate and brings with it a sense of foreboding: as when a character is described as 'as something like a man who was *fey*—led on by a ominous fatality'.<sup>155</sup> Elsewhere its etymology is reformed so as to imply an extension of everyday acts of forecasting and prediction: "Second sight' is a flag over disputed ground' but it is a matter of knowledge 'that there are persons whose yearnings, conceptions—nay, travelled conclusions—continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power'.<sup>156</sup> In a novel described by Gillian Beer as 'haunted by the future' and preoccupied with the resurgence of histories, both individual and collective, second sight opens up a space in which to consider of how 'phantoms of the future', 'vague foreboding' and 'fortune telling' might work upon individual subjectivities situated in those histories.<sup>157</sup> With the multiple temporal potentials of evolutionary theory in mind the following section explores the characterisation of second sight as both a vestigial and advanced behaviour.

### 3.3 SCOTTISH ANCESTORS AND SPIRITUALIST FUTURES

Between 1875 and 1883, the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) undertook a comparative study of the 'Heights, Weights, and Other Physical Characters of the Inhabitants of the British Isles'.<sup>158</sup> The Anthropometric Committee,

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<sup>154</sup>Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* 2 Vols. (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 54

<sup>155</sup>Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts, Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 84-110. See also Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channelling, the Occult and Communications Technologies, 1859-1919* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010)

<sup>156</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), (London: Sovereign, 2013), p. 436

<sup>157</sup>Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 169

<sup>158</sup>See James Urry, 'Englishmen, Celts and Iberians: The Ethnographic Survey of the United Kingdom, 1892-1899', in *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology* ed. George Stocking (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) 83-105

which boasted Francis Galton, the medical statistician William Farr and the anthropologist Augustus Lane Fox [Pitt Rivers] among its members, sought to establish through the tabulation of collected data, a broad understanding of variations in physiological development within the nation; this in turn allowed for causalities to be drawn between evolutionary sequence in nature, physical characteristics and psychological development. For Galton, whose parametric statistical techniques provided the means calibrate these divergences, racial characteristics were essentially indexical to the progress of civilisation. So that a particular trait upon which the success of a nomadic tribe might rely, was gradually rendered anachronistic as that society progresses to a higher level of cultural development. In his *Hereditary Genius: an Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (1869), Galton developed a 15-point scale of 'grades of ability' along which to plot the 'Comparative Worth of Different Races'.<sup>159</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, this scale tended to systematise racialist perceptions of non-Western cultures, so that the Anglo-Saxon was placed above the 'Negro', the Australian Aboriginal further grades below and so on, according to their perceived receptivity to 'civilising' processes. Finding practical application in the science of eugenics, which sought to properly identify and propagate traits deemed useful to the further development of the species, classificatory regimes like Galton's scale reified, schematised and scientised imperialist ideologies. However, conditions of racial fitness were by no means wholly contingent upon the division of non-white from white, or colonised from coloniser. Rather, as is revealed by the BAAS study the domestic population remained similarly subject to processes of assessment and gradation. While it is certainly possible to observe the highest cultivation among some members of the British Isles, others like London's 'dragged, drudged' urban poor, exemplify the kind of hereditary weakness to which eugenics applied itself.<sup>160</sup>

As we have noted in relation to the Folklore Society, Scotland was a popular testing ground for these types of observational practices, with the divide between its Lowland and Highland populations open to frequent anthropological scrutiny.<sup>161</sup> Chairing the Anthropometric Committee was John Beddoe, a founding member of the Ethnographical Society and a Fellow of the Royal Society, whose work promoted

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<sup>159</sup> Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1870), pp. 336-350

<sup>160</sup> *Hereditary Genius*, p. 340

<sup>161</sup> John Beddoe (1826-1911) was educated at UCL and Edinburgh University, and went on to become a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1873. He founded the Ethnological Society and served as president of the Anthropological Institute between 1889 and 1891

the study of hair and eye colour, head size and bone structure as indicators of the ethnic multiplicity of the British populace. In what amounted to a rehearsal of some of the arguments put forward by Robert Knox in his *Races of Men* (1850), this data serviced a reading of the Scottish populace that reiterated the ideologically weighted division of Teutonic and Celtic ancestry. The re-iteration of this partition through anthropometric data was most dramatically expressed in racist depictions of the Irish, where it mixed noxiously with political responses to the Home Rule crisis, but it was also felt in Lowland Scottish and English responses to the Highlands of Scotland.<sup>162</sup> In his *The Races of Britain: A Contribution to the Anthropology of Western Europe* (1862), Beddoe effectively dismantles the Union: while the English and Lowland Scots descend from the Anglo-Saxons, the Celts—Scottish, Welsh and Irish—like the ‘Africanoid’ race retained the traits of Cro-Magnon man.<sup>163</sup>

As the Gaelic historian Silke Stroh has argued, the designation ‘Celt’ is in itself a culturally loaded gesture: ‘the label is highly problematic, being essentially a blanket label for various groups whose main characteristic is their ‘peripherality’ and otherness in relation to hegemonic centre’.<sup>164</sup> In *The Races of Britain*, the dimensions of periphery and centre were reconfigured by a systematic typological discourse that conflated Britain’s colonial and internal others. From fieldwork in the Highlands undertaken during his medical training at Edinburgh University, Beddoe read the Celt through his ‘index of nigrescence’ and identified the inhabitants of the Western Isles and the Outer Hebrides as those furthest alike from the superior Teutonic type.<sup>165</sup> While Scotland, an enthusiastic partner in Britain’s imperial endeavours, cannot be characterised as a colonised country, throughout the nineteenth century its northern population were subject to linguistic, cultural and economic disenfranchisements comparable to those enacted abroad. As is demonstrated by Beddoe’s ‘index of nigrescence’, which recorded the degree of ‘Africanoid’ elements in a given people and from there established their proximity to primitive man, scientific racism was not

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<sup>162</sup> See also John Beddoe, ‘On the Evidence of Phenomena in the West of England to the Permanence of Anthropological Types’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* 4 (1886) and ‘Anthropology and Politics: Kelts and Saxons’, *Anthropological Review* 8 (1871), 211-213 and *A Contribution to Scottish Ethnology* (London, 1855)

<sup>163</sup> Douglas Lorimer, ‘Theoretical Racism in Late-Victorian Anthropology 1870-1900’, *Victorian Studies*, 31, 1988, 405-432

<sup>164</sup> Silke Stroh, *Uneasy Subjects: Postcolonialism and Gaelic Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 1994), p. 14

<sup>165</sup> John Beddoe, *The Races of Britain: A Contribution to the Anthropology of Western Europe* (London: Trubner and Co., 1885), pp. 9-11

wholly contingent upon levels of skin pigmentation.<sup>166</sup> As Lewis P. Curtis observes in regard to the characterisation of the Irish as ‘Africanoid Celts’, ‘not all men in the British Isles were equally white or equal’.<sup>167</sup> Instead, emerging racial typologies worked to reify ingrained historical prejudices by instrumentalising physiognomic and cultural otherness as signifiers of correspondent intellectual inferiority. Moreover, where Knox had charged the Celt ‘the seer of second sight’ with ‘clinging to the past’, the temporality utilised by Beddoe went further to locate the race, like their African counterparts, backwards in evolutionary time.<sup>168</sup>

The classificatory regimes and statistical techniques developed by figures like Beddoe and Galton found practical application in the science of eugenics, which sought to properly identify and propagate traits deemed useful to the further evolution of the species. Because ‘man’s natural abilities are derived from inheritance’ each generation has, for Galton, ‘enormous power over the natural gifts of those that follow’; prized genealogical traits took on a timeless quality and composed a kind of immortality mapped out along hereditary lines.<sup>169</sup> In a response to this evolutionary futurism, given in the spiritualist journal *Light*, the author complained that it requires us to accept a lesser form of post-mortem survival in which the death of the individual is ameliorated only by the continuity of their genetic material: ‘We are told that the aspiration after immortality in the individual must be satisfied by the result of his life on the race’.<sup>170</sup> What rankled this spiritualist author was the notion that ‘Perfected Humanity’ or ‘the grand man’ were the *only* ‘Ideals’ towards which mankind can aspire; a reading that not only denies the existence of an afterlife, but also the possibility of that the individual may be further ‘perfected’ in the hereafter.<sup>171</sup> Spiritualism’s interest in evolutionary theory tended to elide questions of biological development to attend instead to the progression of the soul after death.

In an address to the London Spiritualist Alliance the Reverend J. Page Hopps proposed that the theory of evolution demonstrated that, ‘Man did not begin perfect and end in a ‘fall’; he began imperfect, and is steadily going on in the onward and upward path, out of the animal’s darkness into the angel’s marvellous light. He is not

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<sup>166</sup> Beddoe places the Irish at 65 percent and the Highlander at 45 percent on his index, *Races of Britain*

<sup>167</sup> Lewis P. Curtis, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: a Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 72

<sup>168</sup> Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard), p. 216

<sup>169</sup> Hereditary Genius, pp. 1-4

<sup>170</sup> ‘The Problem of Individual Life’, *Light* 27 May 1882, 248-249 (248)

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* 248

a fallen but a rising creature'.<sup>172</sup> Plotted onto man's post-mortem existence, evolutionism demonstrated humanity's movement towards an increasingly enlightened state. The theory of natural selection and the common animal origins it implied have been typically read as threatening rather than bolstering assumptions of man's spiritual nature, as contributing factors to the decline of religious belief and the subsequent 'disenchantment' of the Western world. Yet when viewed through fragments of Eastern mysticism and cherry-picked doctrines of reincarnation evolutionary science also composed a blueprint for the 'development of man's spiritual being'.<sup>173</sup> This is not to imply that modern spiritualism was only attentive to imagining and reforming the post-mortem world—the tireless social campaigning of believers like William and Mary Howitt suggests quite the opposite—but rather that these earthly investments were mediated by what Beer describes as the 'Future life [...] personal immortality' that 'absolute form of fiction'.<sup>174</sup> The calling into question of the notion of 'Perfected Humanity' might also then signal a distrust of the value systems underpinning this eugenic utopianism. As Ian Hacking has described, 'Galton based his views about inheritance on detailed genealogies, and on a classification of talent fitting his own scale of values'.<sup>175</sup> If we conceive of spiritualists as necessarily liable to the same kinds of subjective reasoning, while attending to their ideological departure from the precepts guiding Galton's taxonomies, it is possible to make the case for the existence of differently-valued racial characteristics or inheritances at stake in spirit communications.

Thinking again of Matthew Arnold's 'undisciplined, anarchical and turbulent' Celt, it is arguable that the prescribed characteristics that rendered that group so ill suited for self-governance, encouraged its notable prominence within spiritualist genealogies. An article on 'The State of the Ossianic Controversy' published in the *Celtic Magazine* in 1876, praised Arnold for his recognition of the Celts as having 'a subtler sense of certain natural affinities than their Anglo-Saxon brethren have', from which they can 'draw from such intuitions of their own sort of inspiration, or second-sight of nature, comparable to prophecy, which gives their highest poetic utterance a

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<sup>172</sup> John Page Hopps, *The Future Life* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1884), p. 12

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12

<sup>174</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 171

<sup>175</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 182

rapt enthusiasm'.<sup>176</sup> It is through the connection delineated here, between the poetic seer of an earlier Romantic tradition and 'primitive' Celt of evolutionary folklore, that spiritualism fashioned a Highland ancestry for itself. While for writers like Arnold the dreamy unrealities of the Celt should ideally be checked by his managed intermixture with Anglo-Saxon rationality, for those keen to challenge the equation of materialism with progress, this imagined race played a different role. In its practice of faith and in its acts of discursive self-mythologising, modern spiritualism accessed second sight as a racially and a temporally embodied tradition. In a letter sent to the editor of *Light* on March 5 1881, for example, we are told of a robbery at a family's 'counting house' and of the uncanny 'prescience' of the event shared by father and son. Recounting this remarkable experience, the younger of the two finds he can only begin to account for it through the family's history: 'we are members of an old Highland family for ages located in Skye [from which] we seem to have inherited the faculty of 'second sight''. Prior to sudden activation of this legacy, the correspondent admits that he would have 'denounced Spiritualism as devilish if true, but probably mere illusion', but now he has been 'compelled to alter' his opinion.<sup>177</sup> Woven into a redemptive narrative of personal enlightenment, the pre-vision activates both an ancestral past and a spiritualist future.

Foundational accounts of second sight like Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* (1690) or Martin Martin's *A Description of the Western Isles* (1703), established the power as largely contingent upon the conditions of the Highlands and Islands. Through these early collectors did not necessarily agree as to the specifics of transmission, whether theorised as having occurred through the machinations of faeries, passed through the male line, or reserved only for the seventh son, loomed large. At stake in a 'Mrs. Blevin's' claim made in *The Spiritual Magazine*, for example, that she derived her powers from a 'family in which second sight is hereditary' was a changing popular understanding of genealogical transmission.<sup>178</sup> Read through Herbert Spencer's imagined psychical evolution, given in his *Principles of Psychology* (1855), wherein 'the countless connections among the fibres of the cerebral masses, answers to some permanent connection in the experiences of the race', the affinity drawn here allows for a direct line of descent between a localised tradition and the

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<sup>176</sup> P. Hatley Waddell, 'The State of the Ossianic Controversy', *The Celtic Magazine* 3 (January 1, 1876) 67-71 (67)

<sup>177</sup> 'An Hours Communion with the Dead', *Light* 5 March 1881, 71

<sup>178</sup> *The Spiritual Magazine* (December 1867), 545

new environs of the urban séance.<sup>179</sup> Significantly, this connection is often imagined in transatlantic terms, with second-sighted heritage frequently written into the personal histories of American mediums. In an account given of the of the famous levitation medium, Daniel Dunglas Home, the *Scots Observer* reported that, ‘He was born near Edinburgh in 1833, but while still a child was taken to America. At the age of thirteen his first experience began with an instance of what is usually termed second sight. A vision of a school friend appeared to him and shortly afterwards he heard of his death’.<sup>180</sup> This history, published in 1889, was most likely sourced from the introduction to Home biography, *Incidents in My Life* (1863), in which much is made of his early visionary experiences: ‘Very early in life he used to surprise those with whom he was, by spontaneously narrating, as scenes passed before his eyes, distant events, such as the death of friends and relatives; and these instances of second sight were found to be true telegraphy’.<sup>181</sup> Recalling the article published in *Bentley’s Miscellany* on the subject ‘Table Turning and Spirit Rapping’, which criticised the connections being drawn between Old World and New World credulities, it is clear that the claiming of Scottish ancestry here performs an oppositional ideological position.

Elsewhere the American seer Andrew Jackson Davis gathered instances of clairvoyance in his childhood under the chapter heading ‘Signs of Second Sight’; William Howitt reported in the *History of the Supernatural*, that the Fox sister’s grandmother ‘had been possessed of the second-sight, and saw frequently funerals, whilst living in Long Island, before they really took place’; and in a report on ‘Spiritualism in America’ given by a London periodical we are told of a ‘Mrs. French’ a ‘trance-speaking medium and medical clairvoyant’ who possessed the ‘power of second sight at a very early age’.<sup>182</sup> Recalling Howitt’s description of Australia’s

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<sup>179</sup>Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1885), p. 581

<sup>180</sup>‘Defence of Spiritualism’ *Scots Observer* 5 January 1889, 194-95 (194). Arriving from America in 1855 Daniel Dunglas Home would go on to dominate British spiritualist discourse for nearly two decades. Favoured by aristocratic patrons like Lady Mount-Temple and frequented by literary figures such as William Makepeace Thackeray and John Ruskin, Home was a key figure in the formation of the short-lived Spiritual Athenaeum in 1866. After a scandal involving lawsuit and accusations of extortion, Home came to represent for many, all that was dangerous and duplicitous in the extraordinary claims of spiritualists.

<sup>181</sup>Daniel Dunglas Home, *Incidents in My Life*, intro. Judge Edmonds (New York: A.J. Davis & Co., 1864), pp. 107-108

<sup>182</sup>Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Magic Staff: An Autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis* (1857), William Howitt *The History of the Supernatural, in all ages and nations, and in all Churches, Christian and Pagan:*



population as composed of Britain's 'overflowings' that have carried with them 'every possible theory and practice, every idea, feeling, passion, speculation, pursuit and imagination which are fermenting in the old countries', the heritages claimed by these mediums can be understood as operating within a similar affective network.<sup>183</sup> The biographical function performed by second sight suggests a re-tracing of the lines of mass emigration from the Scottish Highlands to the New World, and the reclaiming of the fabled visionary power as a component of a denigrated ancestral heritage. In keeping with historical patterns of emigration this transaction also featured in early accounts of the faculty: in 1699, for instance, Lord Reay reported to Samuel Pepys that 'several who did see the Second Sight when in the Highlands or Isles, yet, when transported to other countries, especially America, quite lose this quality'.<sup>184</sup> What has changed is that instead of simply vanishing when forced outside of its original locality, second sight actively shaped the history of its new home by providing a familial and cultural framework for the advent of spirit manifestations. Moreover, held in the racial ancestry of Scottish emigrants, it was empowered to return to British soil in more potent cultural form of modern spiritualism: as Tylor acknowledged in *Primitive Culture*, it is now 'reinstated in a far larger range of society, and under far better circumstances of learning and material prosperity'.<sup>185</sup>

Though the ancestral Highlander served a predominantly biographical role in spiritualism, there are certain homologies between this figure and the 'Red Indian' spirit guide favoured by many Anglo-American mediums. Once more this conflation is not entirely unique: on his tour around the Western Isles Samuel Johnson habitually compared the two and in his *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763) Hugh Blair linked Ossianic Highlander with North American Indians.<sup>186</sup> Just as the power of second-sight was idealised as the product of 'simple habits, quiet peaceful pursuits, lives passed chiefly amid the grand and simple beauties of nature', so to was the success of Native American 'operators' attributed to 'the nomadic and simply

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*Demonstrating a Universal Faith*, Vol. II (London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1863), p. 189, Benjamin Coleman, 'Spiritualism in America—IV', *Spiritual Magazine* (October 1861) 433-439

<sup>183</sup> William Howitt, *Tallangetta, the Squatter's Home*, vol. 1 pp. iii

<sup>184</sup> Lord Reay to Pepys, 24 October 1699, in *The Occult Laboratory*, pp. 161-165 (163)

<sup>185</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, p. 130

<sup>186</sup> Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London: T. Becket and P.A. de Hondt, 1763), p. 23

natural life which these poor children of the forest lived on the earth'.<sup>187</sup> At one with the landscape, untouched by civilisation and innately spiritual, the northern seer and ingenious tribesperson were increasingly read in the same romantic light. In her *Modern American Spiritualism* (1870), Emma Hardinge Britten acknowledged the faith of the 'redmen' in 'ancestral spirits as guardians to mortals' and the converse they hold 'with the spirits of departed friends and kindred', as akin to the theological tenets preached by modern spiritualism and encouraged her reader to be thankful that they have chosen 'a new and beautiful mission for themselves, in guarding and protecting the toiling mediums through whom the truths of Spiritualism are mediated'.<sup>188</sup> Detectable here is the molding of a 'primitive' adept uniquely amenable to the needs of modern spiritualism, as the historian Brian Inglis comments, 'It was as if the Red Indians, passionate believers in the existence of spirits has thereby acquired a standing in the spirit world'.<sup>189</sup>

For the comparative anthropologist this example of cross-cultural animism was too neat to let pass without comment and in *Primitive Culture* Tylor mused, 'suppose a wild North American Indian looking in at a spirit séance in London. As to the presence of disembodied spirits, manifesting themselves by raps, noises, voices and other physical actions, the savage would be perfectly at home in the proceedings for such things are part and parcel of his recognised system of nature'.<sup>190</sup> This supposition received uncanny confirmation in the frequent appearance of Native American spirits in the Victorian séance. On 4 November Tylor attended a session with a 'stout pasty-faced half-educated American' named Mrs. Jeannie Holmes, who became 'possessed by a little Indian girl-spirit named Rosie' who 'talked what she called Ojibwa Indian and I call gibberish', and the next evening, during a séance which was also attended by members of the Crookes family, a medium named Mrs. Olive was 'first possessed by Indian child-spirit' named 'Sunshine'.<sup>191</sup> Commenting on the frequency with which 'Indians' adopted the role of tutelary spirits, Tylor conjectured that, 'the origin of the movement being in America is clearly betokened by the same set of Indian and negro spirits going through the whole posse of

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<sup>187</sup> Thomas Brevoir, 'Mysteries of Nature and of Spirit Prevision', *Spiritual Magazine* (December, 1865) 566-571 (570) and Emma Hardinge Britten, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communication Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (New York: Banner of Light, 1870), p. 482

<sup>188</sup> *Modern American Spiritualism*, p. 482

<sup>189</sup> Brian Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural: A History of the Paranormal for the Earliest Times to 1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p. 207

<sup>190</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 pp. 155-6

<sup>191</sup> Stocking, 'Animism in Theory and Practice', 97

mediums, who are possessed very much after a set pattern developed no doubt by the American practitioners'.<sup>192</sup> What Tylor detected in the séance was not the miraculous channeling of native spirits, but the hackneyed performance of cultural signifiers.

The restaging of imperial encounters within the confines of the domestic séance invites several readings. On the one hand, in claiming second-sighted ancestry or affinity with the 'redman', spiritualist discourse retraced lines of domestic expulsion and colonial expansion in order to privilege systems of knowledge antithetical to modern Western European society. More fully realised in the occult interests of the Theosophical Society, which relocated its headquarters to India in 1879, and participated in that country's campaign for independence, nineteenth-century occultism habitually located otherworldly and religious authority in the mystical practices and beliefs of indigenous cultures.<sup>193</sup> Discussing the appearance of non-white spirits in the séance Marlene Tromp proposes that 'the fluidity implied in the identity of the colonised and the coloniser in these acts of materialisation undermined the English sense of superiority and Orientalist inferiority'.<sup>194</sup> Such a reading fits well with an established image of spiritualism as a movement supportive to the anti-slavery cause and allied to other Victorian radicalisms such as socialism, vegetarianism, woman's suffrage and anti-vivisection. As Molly McGarry has demonstrated, the privileging of Native Americans as spirit guides translated to political action, as Spiritualists 'called for the protection of native lands and sovereignty, labouring to right the wrongs of colonists while also salvaging the spiritual life of white Americans'.<sup>195</sup> Without seeking to dismantle this critical narrative, which finds a great deal of support in spiritualist discourse, it is possible to offer another reading of these 'primitive' connections. As McGarry also cautions, while spiritualists understood 'Native Americans as sharing a spirituality roughly equivalent to their own, they saw these 'premodern' people as bereft of other traits of civilisation'.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>193</sup> See Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society: The History of a Spiritualist Movement* (Florida: BrownWalker Press, 2012)

<sup>194</sup> Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 81

<sup>195</sup> Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth Century* (California: University of California Press, 2008), p. 15

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. p. 75

Delineated throughout this chapter is the co-dependency between popular evolutionism and modern spiritualism: in the reliance of comparative anthropological models upon spirit rapping as an exemplary ‘survival’ of primitive thought, or conversely in the paradigmatic shift precipitated by the séance on evolutionary thinkers like Alfred Russel Wallace, and importantly in the ways in which British spiritualism produced itself through this developmentalism. Given these inter-links, it is perhaps unsurprising that spiritualism tended to mirror rather than dismantle the evolutionary accounts of human progress underwriting colonialist imperatives. The ancient and uncorrupted rituals of indigenous peoples, though venerated to a degree, were written into the movement’s own evolutionary timeframe where they remain representative of an earlier or lower iteration of the spiritualist message. So in his *History of the Supernatural*, Howitt discovers the ‘eternal law’ of spiritualism operating ‘in ‘the very lowest manifestations, as in the Australians and Negroes’, though it does so in these cases ‘under mountains of encumbrance’, and Brittan warns of a darker side to ‘Indian spiritualism’ involving ‘rites and phenomena of strange, occult and repulsive character’, which the modern movement has rightly thrown off.<sup>197</sup> Where Tylor flattened out the differences between the ‘Red Indian medicine-man, the Tatar necromancer, the Highland ghost-seer, and the Boston medium’, some spiritualist writing attended upon a hierarchy that acknowledged these marginalised practices as necessary stages in an evolutionary process, the pinnacle of which was currently realised in the spirit communications being held in the parlours of America and Western Europe. Considering the biographical function served by second sight to this project, it is significant that the faculty features most prominently in the early life of mediums: just as the primitive islander presents, in evolutionary terms, the childhood of the race, so to are their visionary traditions designated as prior. Written into the spiritualist bildungsroman, the second sight of the Highlander is arguably subject to generational erasure, imagined as an essential but early iteration of a faculty whose potential is only fully realised in the form of spirit mediumship.

## CONCLUSION

In a paper delivered to the International Folklore Congress in 1891, Edward B. Tylor described for his audience some of the charms and amulets held by the Pitt-Rivers

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<sup>197</sup> *The History of the Supernatural*, vol. 1 p. 56 and *Modern American Spiritualism*, p. 482

Museum. Of particular interest was a ‘large *corp cre*’ or ‘clay body’, which Tylor recounted was ‘made only two years ago in a parish in the far north of Scotland’. Though, ‘the known practice of putting such a clay figure in running water, that the victim might waste away likewise, has fortunately not been observed in the case’, the pins and needles pressed into to the roughly hewn form ‘testify to a similar spiteful intent’. Concluding his thoughts on the object, the anthropologist mused that it composed ‘curious evidence for the conservatism of magic—the most conservative of human arts—that our civilised country still furnishes specimens which Australia or Egypt cannot rival’.<sup>198</sup> Thinking once more of the link between domestic and colonial forms of otherness, it is significant that Tylor identified the continued practice of such dark arts within ‘our civilised country’, in the same moment as he assured his Oxford audience of their own distance from the ‘far’ off Highlands, from where this ‘barbaric’ object has been procured.<sup>199</sup> Also pressing is the characterisation of magic as a deeply ‘conservative’ art, a description that connotes not only a tradition, but also an unwillingness or active antipathy to change and progress. For Tylor a similarly immovable conservatism lay at the heart of the modern spiritualist movement, rendering it foolishly anachronistic and ill suited to the needs of advanced society.

This position is one refuted by modern scholarship, which has cited the movement’s politically radical credentials and revolutionary gender politics as evidence of its inherently progressive nature. The Howitt family can be easily written into to this narrative: having taken up campaigns against the evils of alcohol, vivisection, game and poor laws, their spiritualist conversion was one bound to the same reformist zeal. In addition to petitioning on national issues, William Howitt also published a tract warning against the evils of colonisation: written prior to the Australia adventure, *Colonisation and Christianity* (1838) was a history of the ‘treatment of the natives by the Europeans’ that sought to expose centuries of ‘unexampled crimes and marvellous impolicy’ towards the ‘unlettered nations’.<sup>200</sup> Although Tylor established considerable distance between his work and the follies of spiritualism, it should be noted that his work was arguably underpinned by the same religious training that prompted Howitt to highlight the sins of imperialism. In a recent

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<sup>198</sup> Edward B. Tylor, *Exhibition of Charms and Amulets*, *Transactions of the International Folk-Lore Congress 1891* (London: D. Nutt, 1892) Tylor Papers Pitt Rivers, Box 4 4/12 387-394 (390)

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> William Howitt, *Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in all Their Colonies* (London: Longman, Orne, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1838), p. 508

monograph, Efram Sera-Shirar has underlined the centrality of Quakerism to the development of anthropology as discipline. Not only were most of the nineteenth-century's prominent practitioners from this religious background, the 'Quaker doctrine of the 'inner light'' that 'placed great emphasis on viewing all humans as equal' lent itself easily to the precepts of monogenism.<sup>201</sup> Along similar lines, Timothy Larsen has argued for a greater critical engagement with the influence of Quakerism on Tylor's early career, citing his lifelong antipathy to the ceremonial aspects of religion as evidence of the continued authority of his upbringing.<sup>202</sup> This connection is not made with the intention of uncovering hidden religious longings in *Primitive Culture*, but rather to suggest a means of further complicating any easy division between Victorian social science and spiritualism. Considering the ways in which spiritualist discourse forced evolutionary theory to reflect upon the afterlife has raised questions regarding the other side of this exchange; namely, how does an awareness of this interaction impact upon our understanding of anthropology as a secularising or disenchanting force in Victorian culture? Read through the complex geographical and temporal plotting of the second-sight tradition, these discourses have revealed shared etiological and genealogical preoccupations, and common methodologies.

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<sup>201</sup> Sera-Shirar, *The Making of British Anthropology, 1813-1871*, p. 154

<sup>202</sup> Timothy Larsen, 'E.B. Tylor, Religion and Anthropology'

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PSYCHICAL RESEARCH, FOLKLORE AND ROMANCE, 1880-1910

In an article published by *Belgravia* in April 1890, Marie Corelli, having conjured the image of ‘Mr. Andrew Lang’ sat ‘on his little bibliographic dust-heap’ and wondering ‘Was Jehovah a stone Fetish?’ bemoaned that, ‘Our age is one of Prose and Positivism; we take Deity for an Ape, and Andrew Lang as its Prophet!’<sup>1</sup> Structured around a series of polemical correspondences, her complaint unearthed a common enemy in anthropology and the perceived erosion of religious belief, and in the fashion for particular literary forms and the scientism apparently dominating Victorian cultural life. Written in defence of her fellow novelist ‘Ouida’ against the ‘large number of self-styled “superior” people in the literary world’ who ‘make it a sort of rule to treat’ her work with contempt, the article weighed in on a boundary dispute, fought through the closing years of the nineteenth century, concerning the proper form and function of literature in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.<sup>2</sup> At the turn of the century Corelli used her considerable public platform to denounce the modern literary evils of Decadence, naturalism and French novels, while promoting her own popular romances as morally and spiritually wholesome alternatives. The distinguishing feature of the Corellian romance was its self-referential treatment of literary genre: while these fictions covered a significant range of settings and themes, through ancient Egypt, mystical northern countries, Biblical lands, distant planets and spiritual realms, common to all was the self-conscious opposition of a mechanistic and irreligious present with the timeless spirituality embodied by the romance form itself.<sup>3</sup> In offering her support to the ‘fair, pure and proud’ work of Ouida, Corelli also insisted upon the necessary sub-division of the romance genre itself. Situated in opposition to Rider H. Haggard’s widely praised *She: A History of Adventure* (1887), which is ‘a ghastly *fantasy* [...] a smile, a sneer, and a doubtful shrug at beautiful fact’, Ouida’s ‘In Maremma’, though condemned critics as ‘improbable’ is, we are assured,

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Corelli, ‘A Word about “Ouida”’, *Belgravia: a London Magazine*, April 1890, 362-371 (367)

<sup>2</sup> A Word about “Ouida”, 366

<sup>3</sup> Martin Hipsky, ‘The Corellian Romance *contra* Modernity: *The Treasure of Heaven* and *Innocent’s Women’s Writing* 13.2 (2006) 206-224

a ‘perfect Love-Poem in prose’ and an expression of ‘beautiful *fact*’.<sup>4</sup> Leaving aside for the moment the hermeneutic implications of partitioning of ‘fantasy’ from ‘fact’, the peculiar ideological shading of this division demands attention.<sup>5</sup>

Along with the imperial adventures of Rudyard Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson, which Corelli also critiqued here, Haggard’s work formed part of a new wave of adventure fiction that came to prominence in the late nineteenth century. Staged on a variously imagined colonial frontier and dramatising muscular encounters with ‘primitive’ peoples, these fictions were praised by their supporters as composing a robustly healthful alternative to both the introspective morbidity of the modern naturalist school and to minutia of the everyday explored by the realist novel.<sup>6</sup> Described by Andrew Lang as ‘King Romance’, works like Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883) and Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), re-inscribed the genre as a site of male self-realisation enacted in wild spaces removed from the stifling femininity of the middle-class domestic.<sup>7</sup> Typically occupied by perilous journeys into the world’s unchartered regions, and with the complex juxtaposition of civilised and savage values, this new breed of romance formed itself in close proximity with Victorian investigative practices: anthropology, archaeology, folklore, ethnography and comparative mythology. Part of what was at stake in Corelli’s promotion of the ‘fair, pure and proud’ work of Ouida over the bloody horrors of Haggard’s ‘ghastly fantasy’, was a refutation of not only the latter’s gendered exclusivity, but also of the language and ideological structures implicit in these disciplines.

Rightly identified as the movement’s ‘Prophet’, Lang spearheaded this revival and provided it with a manifesto, ‘Realism and Romance’ in the *Contemporary Review* 1887, which argued for the moral function of adventure narrative as speaking to

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<sup>4</sup> ‘A Word about “Ouida”’, 366 (original italics)

<sup>5</sup> ‘Ouida’ was the pseudonym of the English novelist Maria Louise Ramee (1839-1908), who published over 40 novels, children’s books, short stories and essays. Her generically expansive work took in the historical romance, the sensation novel and the adventure narrative and the author’s more well known works include, *Two Little Wooden Shoes* (1875), *A Dog of Flanders* (1872) and a play about women’s liberation *Afternoon* (1883)

<sup>6</sup> Much of the critical response to the romance revival has drawn attention to the ambivalent gender politics at play, Elaine Showalter has argued that male writers, in reaction to the dominance of female novelists—in the 1870s and 1880s more than forty percent of the authors within large publishing houses were women—attempted to construct a uniquely masculine literary form, written by and pitched to men, ‘King Romance’, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), pp. 76-104. See also Stephen Arata, *Fictions of the Loss in the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Bradley Deane, ‘Imperial Barbarians: Primitive Masculinity in Lost World Fiction’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008), 205-225 and Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982)

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘At the Sign of the Ship’, *Longman’s Magazine* (March 1887), 554



some essential primitivism simmering beneath the surface of civilisation: ‘Not for nothing did Nature leave us all savages under our white skins; she has wrought us thus that we might have many delights, among others “the joy of adventurous living”’.<sup>8</sup> A respected folklorist and mythologist as well as a literary critic, during the late 1880s and 1890s Lang used his weekly column in *Longman’s Magazine* to discuss adventure fiction and anthropological discovery as largely co-dependant and interconnected subject areas. Identifying in the revived masculine romance the hallmarks of myth, epic and oral folklore, Lang praised the form as a petition to the ‘ancestral barbarism of our natures’.<sup>9</sup> Against this celebration of primal nature, Corelli posited her wildly metaphysical and melodramatic plots as means of spiritual evolution and religious confirmation. Defining the romance as ‘the idealisation of human thought into Ideal language’, she charged it with lifting ‘the aspirations of man upward’, away from material concerns and towards a transcendental realisation of the Divine.<sup>10</sup>

From the publication of her first novel in 1886 to the early 1920s, Corelli was Britain’s best-selling author. Enjoying a large and worldwide readership, stalked by press photographers and attracting huge crowds to each public appearance—the novelist was a late-Victorian celebrity.<sup>11</sup> Yet this popular acclaim was marred by the almost universally negative critical reception that greeted her every publication. Pilloried as a self-aggrandising hack, her novels were roundly condemned as examples of an increasingly vapid mass culture at its worst. A review, printed in *The Spectator* following the author’s death, encapsulates the general tone of the critical response: ‘Marie Corelli was a woman of deplorable talent who imagined she was a genius, and was accepted as a genius by a public to whose commonplace sentimentalities and prejudices she gave a glamorous setting and an impressive scale’.<sup>12</sup> In response to the harsh criticisms levelled at her person and at her work the novelist declaimed publically, and with notable frequency, on the corruption and elitism poisoning the literary world. In a letter to her publisher George Bentley in 1890, Corelli complained

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘Realism and Romance’, *Contemporary Review* 49 (1886), 689

<sup>9</sup> Lang, *Realism and Romance*, 688

<sup>10</sup> Marie Corelli, ‘A Little Talk About Literature’, 1913 MS Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-Upon-Avon MS DR77/23

<sup>11</sup> Annette R. Federico, *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture* (London: University Press of Virginia, 2000) and Teresa Ransom, *The Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli: Queen of Victorian Bestsellers* (London: Bulbeck, 1999)

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in William Stuart Scott, *Marie Corelli: The Story of a Friendship* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p. 30

that ‘the ‘Saville Club’ knows me not, and Andrew Lang of sixteen newspapers detests me’, a conflation that made clear what the author perceived as underpinning the ambivalent reception with which her novels were met: namely her physical prohibition from male writers clubs and by extension the exclusion of her voice from a broader literary discourse. A prominent and hugely influential critic, Lang reviewed for dozens of periodicals and several newspapers, attracted a substantial readership to his ‘At the Sign of the Ship’ in *Longman’s Magazine* from 1886 to 1905, and published several novels, including *The World’s Desire* (1890) and *Montezuma’s Daughter* (1893) with his friend and collaborator Rider Haggard.<sup>13</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising then, that across private letters, magazine articles and several novels he persisted as a figure emblematic of the male privilege, snobbery and toadyism against which Corelli felt forced to pit herself. In the vividly re-drawn literary world of her best-selling moral fable *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), for example, Lang makes an appearance as the reprehensible ‘David McWhing’: the ‘most formidable’ critic in London, a ‘Scotchman’ with his ‘finger in every pie’ implicated in a crooked system of review in which ‘he generally gives the “lead”, and has his own way with the editors’.<sup>14</sup> Easily bribed and obsessed with uncovering the next literary ‘boom’, McWhing must also be ‘managed’, we are warned, for ‘he might, just for the sake of “showing off”, cut you up rather roughly’.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, she dedicated an anonymously published satire, *The Silver Domino: or side whispers, social and literary* (1892), to the Scottish critic whose ‘shrill piping utterance is even as the voice of Delphic oracles, pronouncing judgment on all men and all things’.<sup>16</sup>

What makes this argument interesting, over the many other squabbles that dogged her career, is its complex staging amongst the ideologically weighted categories of high and low, middle-brow and modern, realist and romantic, feminine and masculine that informed literary production at the *fin de siècle*. Though it is

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<sup>13</sup> In the one of the only major works dedicated to Lang, Roger Lancelyn Green’s *Andrew Lang: A Critical Biography* (Leicester: Edmund Ward, 1946) an extensive short-title bibliography provides a list of the author’s major contributions to Victorian periodicals which runs to over 400 articles appearing in publications that include *The Illustrated London News*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, *Fraser’s Magazine*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *Forum*, *The Century Magazine*, *The Contemporary Review*, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, *The Academy*, *The New Review* and *MacMillan’s Magazine* (250-259). The only other biographical account of Lang is given in Antonius de Coca’s *Andrew Lang: A Nineteenth Century Anthropologist* (Amsterdam: Uitg Zwijsen Tilburg, 1968)

<sup>14</sup> Marie Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), p. 94

<sup>15</sup> *Sorrows of Satan*, p. 154, 94

<sup>16</sup> Marie Corelli, *The Silver Domino: or side whispers, social and literary* (London: Lamely and Co., 1894, p. 311

certainly not the case that such binaries emerge only in a late nineteenth-century context, it useful to consider it as the period in which, as Roger Luckhurst has written with regard to science fiction, the 'sites', 'terminology' and 'the very forms and genres of the modern concept of popular literature were founded'.<sup>17</sup> Despite their differences, both wrote from positions inside the discursive tumult that accompanied the entrenchment of these categories. A prominent example of this literary discord can be found in the 'Art of Fiction' controversy, which was played out across multiple periodicals in closing years of the 1880s and featured Lang as a key participant.<sup>18</sup> Precipitated by a lecture delivered by Walter Besant to the Royal Institution in April 1884 and carried on by, among others, Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson, the debate concerned the aesthetic nature and practice of the novel as an artistic form.<sup>19</sup> Though they do not fully encompass the discussion's scope, the critical relations between realist fiction and its romantic antithesis composed a significant theme, with questions of narrative, thematic treatment and creative function frequently answered with recourse to this division. Enacted in the shadow of a rapidly evolving literary market, this schism reflected anxieties concerning the impact of commercialisation and mass literacy upon the artistic 'value' of the book. As is suggested by Joseph Conrad's categorisation of 'philistines' as the 'sort of people who read Marie Corelli' and by one of her biographer's contention that, 'Her public were unable to distinguish between literature and trash, and moreover, were unwilling to try', Corelli's hugely successful novels were frequently forced to act as analogues for the widening gap between serious literature and popular fiction, or of a rapidly encroaching mass culture.<sup>20</sup>

In a recent discussion of the romance, Linda Dryden echoes many of its Victorian adversaries when she proposes that these 'represented simple escapism'

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<sup>17</sup> Rodger Luckhurst, 'The Many Deaths of Science Fiction: A Polemic', *Science Fiction Studies*, 21.1 (March, 1994), 35-50 (41)

<sup>18</sup> Mark Spilka, 'Henry James and Walter Besant: "The Art of Fiction" Controversy', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 6.2 (Winter, 1973), 101-119 and Stephen Arata, 'Henry James "The Art of Fiction" (1884)', *Victorian Review* 35.1 (Spring 2009), 53-56

<sup>19</sup> Anna Vaninskaya has complicated this by drawing attention to the overlaps and interdependencies between forms of fiction in this period, and the retrospective imposition of genres by the early twentieth century marketers, 'The Late Victorian Romance Revival: A Generic Excursus', *English Literature in Transition* 51.1 (January 2008) 57-79

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Conrad to Aniela Zagoska 1898, in *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, II, 1898-1902 ed. Fredrick R. Karl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 137-8 and Brian Masters, Brian Masters, *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter: The Extraordinary Life of Marie Corelli* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 67

whose ‘appeal lay in their ability to transport readers away from everyday concerns’.<sup>21</sup> What is erased in the dismissal of ‘uncomplicated exotic romance’, however, is the absolute seriousness with which authors and supporters of the ‘restored Romance’ attended to their genre’s peculiarly psychological qualities.<sup>22</sup> Where realism promises ‘characters most admirably studied from life’, the wild imaginative flights and persistent supernaturalism of the romance offered insights into the more mysterious spaces of the psyche; or as Gillian Beer has it, while the realist novel is ‘preoccupied with representing and interpreting the known world’, the romance strives to make ‘apparent the dreams of the world’.<sup>23</sup> In spite of her exclusion from what is acerbically termed in *The Silver Domino* as the ‘Great Fraternity’, Corelli’s ‘romances of interiority’ pursued comparable narrative imperatives to those staked out by writers like Stevenson and Haggard.<sup>24</sup> The definition given by Lang in an article for *St. James’s Gazette* in 1888 of ‘Romance’, as the element in fiction that ‘gives a sudden sense of the strangeness and beauty of life; that power that has the gift of dreams and admits us into a region where men are more brave and passions more intense than in ordinary existence’, captured exactly the emotional intensities and allegoric characterisation that defined Corelli’s best-selling moral fables.<sup>25</sup>

While it is not my intention to force the posthumous reconciliation of two obviously ill suited and adversarial historical protagonists, it is the part of the work of this chapter to expand on certain commonalities. Variance in approach and ideological position aside, both mounted a defence of the romance genre against a critically sanctioned realist aesthetic on the grounds that it imbibed qualities somehow essential to the psychological or spiritual health of the reader. In turn, each conceived of the creative impulse itself as one that exceeded rational limits to gesture toward structures and forces beyond the individual artist: where for Lang this engaged questions of folkloric and mythological transmission—what the cultural and temporal survival of particular narratives revealed about the nature of the imagination—Corelli was primarily invested in artistic production as an act that accessed elements of the

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (London: MacMillan, 2000), p. 2

<sup>22</sup> *Realism and Romance*, 688

<sup>23</sup> Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1884), p. 42 and Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 54

<sup>24</sup> See Martin Hipsky, *Modernism and the Women’s Popular Romance in Britain, 1885-1925* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011)

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘Romance and the Reverse’, *St. James’s Gazette*, 7 November 1888

sublime or the transcendental.<sup>26</sup> Though, as we have seen, the anthropologist's valorisation of the 'ancestral barbarism of our natures', presents a marked divergence from the spiritualised femininity valorised by Corelli, similarities can be observed in the moral functions these idealised representations are imagined to perform.<sup>27</sup> Most usefully, in their preoccupation with the structures, components and affective powers of narrative, as expressed by ancient myth, Biblical fable and peasant folk tale, both authors highlighted the interconnections between story telling and the individual or 'public' mind.

Such connections are sought out in order to pursue a reading of the Scottish second sight tradition that considers it as both a *product* and *producer* of the romance genre in this period. This will involve attending more closely, on the one hand, to the narrative components and generic framing of prophetic narratives—as folklore, personal anecdote, fiction and so on—and on the other, to the cadence of non-embodied or prophetic vision as a form or analogue of creative inspiration. Respecting the suggestion made by Stevenson in his 1884 essay, 'A Humble Remonstrance', that the fantastic in literature 'appeals to certain sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man', attention is paid here to the interconnectivities between literary form and evolving psychological understandings of the imagination.<sup>28</sup> In regard to this objective, our protagonists offer up two distinct yet related lines of investigation. While Lang's extensive writing on the topic of second sight, pursued through comparative anthropology, folklore, Scottish and literary histories, permits us to chart its progress through multiple late-Victorian disciplines; the attention paid by Corelli, in her fictional and critical writings, to questions of artistic inspiration offer an opportunity to extend the lineage, explored in previous chapters, between the premonitory powers of the Highlander and the theoretical elaboration of creative inspiration. These strands of enquiry overlap in two key cultural sites: firstly in the discursive production of the romance genre, and secondly in the epistemological positions offered by the nascent discourses of what Corelli terms, 'Psychical Science'.<sup>29</sup> Despite occupying quite different positions regarding this developing discourse, Lang being a key contributor, frequent member and one-time president of

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<sup>26</sup> See Rita Felski, 'Love, God and the Orient: Reading the Popular Sublime' in *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 115-144

<sup>27</sup> 'Realism and Romance', 689

<sup>28</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', *Longman's Magazine* 5 (1884), 139-47

<sup>29</sup> Marie Corelli, 'Deceiving the Very Elect: A Comment on "Spiritualism"' 1920 MS Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-Upon-Avon DR773/23

the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) while Corelli's experience constituted that of a non-institutional commentator, both found in its research a new language with which to re-conceptualise exceptional phenomena in relation to creativity and narrative modalities. Charting the interdisciplinary connections between science and literature, the chapter seeks to understand the resonance of the 'visionary' in the popular cultures of the *fin de siècle*.

Formally established in 1882, the SPR expanded the investigative imperatives of earlier organisations such as the Ghost Club, founded in 1862, and the Oxford Phasmatological Society (1879-1885) to present an 'organised and systematic attempt to investigate the large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and Spiritualistic'.<sup>30</sup> Founded in Cambridge by, among others, the physicist Professor W.F. Barrett, philosopher Henry Sidgwick, classicist Frederic W. H. Myers and spiritualist Edmund Dawson Rogers, the SPR boasted a membership that spanned Victorian society, taking in members of the aristocracy, academic elite and medical profession. Despite conducting their investigations on the periphery of the British medical establishment, the SPR exercised a cultural influence that far exceeded the conceivable reach of a fringe organisation and its findings were reproduced widely in newspapers and in the periodical press. While earlier organisations like the Phasmatological Society had operated along the lines of an informal club, whose members were encouraged to share an 'original Ghost Story' or 'some psychological experience of interest' with the similarly inclined, from its inception the SPR adopted the characteristics of a scientific body by instituting a system of peer review, publishing its findings and pertinently, distancing itself from the language of the supernatural, the occult and the ghostly.<sup>31</sup> Though dismissed by some, such as the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley, as little more than a society for 'ghost-seers and ghost-seekers' and conflated by others with the spiritualist movement, under the leadership of the philosopher Henry Sidgwick its members observed an officially agnostic stance: extraordinary extra-sensory abilities, spirit possessions, instances of prophetic foresight, death wraiths and so on, were to be subjected to rigorous scientific scrutiny from a position of scepticism rather than unquestioning belief.<sup>32</sup> From its inception Lang contributed his significant public

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<sup>30</sup> 'Objects of the Society', *PSPR* 1 (1882-3), 3

<sup>31</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 77

<sup>32</sup> Henry Maudsley, *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (London: Kegan Paul, 1897), p. 73

platform to the dissemination of the SPR's research: in addition to his frequent publications in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, from the late 1880s onwards he also gave over a sizeable portion of his *Longman's* column to the discussion of psychical topics and began to define his intellectual practice as that of a 'Psycho-Folklorist'.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to this personal and professional embeddedness, Corelli, who was not a member of the Society and never published in its journal, approached the SPR as primarily a creative resource and her melodramatic narratives were punctuated by its language and imageries. As a field of investigation predicated on the possible existence of laws other than those credited by the natural sciences, psychical research held immense spiritual and creative potentials.

The early history of the Society for Psychical Research has been subject to a great deal of scholarly enquiry: studies such as Alan Gauld's *The Founders of Psychical Research* (1968) have traced its unique institutional history, Henri F. Ellenberger and Adam Crabtree are among those to have explored the links between the work of the SPR and foundational models of the unconscious: while scholars like Pamela Thurschwell, Shane McCroristine, Owen Davies and Rhodri Hayward have pursued investigations into its broader cultural and literary meaning.<sup>34</sup> Despite his significant contribution to psychical discourse in this period and his prominent role in its popular dissemination, Lang remains a subsidiary figure in the majority of these studies and several factors have contributed to this marginal position.<sup>35</sup> In the first instance, where experimental research contributed to the configuration of vital psychological concepts, Lang's approach to psychical questions remained primarily that of an anthropologist and as such he can not be credited with the working through of particular hypothesis, like Frederic Myers's 'telepathy' or Edmund Gurney's 'phantasm'. Secondly, the extensiveness of his academic interests, which

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<sup>33</sup>As Dorson has noted 'Of two hundred and forty-one 'Ships', one hundred and thirty-six contained folklore entries [...] The Ships are filled to their holds with dreams, hallucinations, apparitions, conjure tricks, coincidences, crystal-gazing, *déjà vu*, poltergeists, dowsing spirit rapping, telepathy—the whole gamut of modern mysteries', *The British Folklorists*, p. 213

<sup>34</sup>Adam Crabtree *Animal Magnetism, Early Hypnotism and Psychical Research 1766-1925* (New York: Krus International Publications, 1988), Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge, 1968), Rhodri Hayward, *Resisting History: Popular Religion and the Origins of the Unconscious* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), Shane McCroristine. *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-seeing in England, 1750-1920*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

<sup>35</sup>Important exception to this include Roger Luckhurst's *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (2002), which gives over a significant time in 'Telepathic Doxai: Knowledge and Belief at the Imperial Margin' to considering Lang's unique contribution to the discourses of psychical research, and Alan Gauld's *Andrew Lang as Psychical Researcher* (London: Society for Psychical Research, 1983)

roamed through folklore, anthropology, fairytales, ballads, mythography, Scottish history, literary criticism, poetry, biography, classical scholarship and golf, make it difficult to make a claim for him as only or even primarily a ‘psychical researcher’.

In the editorials that followed his death in 1912 the breadth of his scholarly pursuits, though praised as evidence of his ‘insatiable curiosity’, also served to evince an intellectual engagement that ‘was wide’ but ‘not deep’.<sup>36</sup> For *The Athenaeum* he ‘had outlived his age, for he was almost the last writer of the causerie on scholarly subjects’ and *The Academy* proposed that his ‘very versatility became his undoing’.<sup>37</sup> By his own admission no ‘specialist’, who chose instead to ‘dabble in a good many topics’, his refusal to bend to the demands of specialisation and his willingness to speak across disciplinary boundaries often unearthed methodological tensions between different terrains of knowledge.<sup>38</sup> These disruptive tendencies go some way to explaining Lang’s habitually antagonistic relation to the SPR—as his fellow researcher Walter Leaf commented ‘he has on former occasions had a playful habit of firing a chance shot or two into the ranks of his friends’—and at least partly account for his marginal position in recent accounts of the Society.<sup>39</sup> Yet the qualities that have led to his being sidelined by modern histories and dismissed as an old-fashioned dilettante by nineteenth-century commentators, offer up a unique perspective—at once inside and outside—on the history and cultural salience of psychical research.

Most usefully, the anthropologist’s peculiarly liminal position mirrored the one held by second sight in this new institutional context. Though Highland second sight was the subject of a dedicated investigation from 1894 to 1895, previous to this the phenomenon participated in a range of research categories. The historian Ronald Pearsall’s description of clairvoyance as ‘an odds and ends corner, into which anything was thrown’ might equally apply to second sight, which was variously interpreted as a subset of clairvoyance, a form of crystal vision, an example of the newly coined ‘telepathy’ and a form of ‘crisis hallucination’.<sup>40</sup> Where the following chapter gives time over to the significance of the SPR as a new methodological,

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Steele, ‘Andrew Lang and His Work’, *The Academy* (July 27, 1912), 117-8 (118)

<sup>37</sup> ‘Andrew Lang’, *The Athenaeum* (July 27, 1912) 92-3 (92) and *The Academy* (May 17, 1913), 628-29 (628)

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Lang to Donald Hay Fleming, April 11 1912, St. Andrews msdept. 113-22-26d-26d

<sup>39</sup> Walter Leaf, ‘*Cock Lane and Commonsense Review*’, *PSPR* 10 (1894), 423-6 (423)

<sup>40</sup> Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1972), p. 126



semiotic and institutional framework for second sight, our concern here is with a broader cultural discussion regarding the nature of 'inner' vision and its relation to artistic production. To this end, it is necessary to attend to the disjuncture between the taxonomic or universalising gestures of this new scientific organisation and the historical, geographic and literary peculiarities of the second-sight tradition in Scotland. Respecting the suggestion made by Gillian Beer in relation to the co-dependency of evolutionary theory and the novel, that 'is at the point of difficulty between resistance and explanation that many Victorian imaginative uses of the Darwinism are located', this chapter begins its reading of second sight at comparable site of ontological tension.<sup>41</sup> Expanding upon the intellectual context established by the previous chapter, we are here concerned with the interaction between evolutionary paradigms and fictional narrative in the late nineteenth century. Thinking once more of the condemnation of the Victorian age as 'one of Prose and Positivism' where 'we take Deity for an Ape, and Andrew Lang as its Prophet', my interest is with how particular literary forms come so powerfully to connote scientific positions in this period, and more specifically, with Corelli's efforts to instate the romance genre as a bridge linking scientific theory with religious principle, capable of engaging the reading public.<sup>42</sup> As we will see, the pull between 'resistance and explanation' composed a defining feature of the Corellian romance; the assertion of the ineffability of the spiritual world coupled with the assurance of science's ability to explore and reveal that realm to the believer. This duality also informed Lang's often contradictory thinking regarding the question of Highland pre-vision: in the topic's migration across his folkloric, anthropological, literary, historical and psychical studies, the perceived *romance* of the second-sighted narrative tends to disrupt the conditions of these interpretative frames.

In his discussion of the development of a nineteenth-century mass culture, Nicholas Daly reminds us that, 'there is no possibility of "rescuing" some authentic, fully autonomous essence of the popular; rather the popular inhabits that grey area where the less powerful confront, adopt, adapt, or even reject the ideologies of a more powerful group'.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of their prominence within Victorian society, as a

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<sup>41</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 112

<sup>42</sup> Corelli, 'A Word about "Ouida"', 367

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 5

celebrity novelist or a respected cultural and scholarly commentator, both Corelli and Lang sought to cultivate a degree of distance from institutional power that would permit them to critique the discourses in whose production they were also implicated. The first section of this chapter explores how Lang's status as an outsider, largely predicated on his sense of a distinct national identity, impacted upon his arguably schizophrenic reading of the second sight tradition; which at times confirmed its deep affinity to place and national imagination, and elsewhere insisted upon it as an expression of phenomenon common to all human experience. From here, the following section returns to Corelli and her adept negotiation of scientific and religious registers within several popular fictions. Attention is paid to the close articulation of the novelist's defence of romance's moral function with the language of psychical research and the theorisation of a developing 'popular' culture. Finally, the last section brings the two together once more to query how theories of extra-sensory sight or folkloric forms of pre-vision inform their thinking on the function and nature of the imagination.

#### 4.1 ANDREW LANG AND 'PSYCHO-FOLKLORE'

In a letter to Edward Burnett Tylor in March of 1894, Andrew Lang boasted that he had just arrived from home having spent time with 'a set of second sighted Celts'. In another, this one undated, he recounted that 'I am only just returned from Glencoe, where you should go if you want to see "Primitive Culture". The Second Sight man is a regular institution. I interviewed him through an interpreter'.<sup>44</sup> Playing to the interests of his old mentor, whose foundational *Primitive Culture* (1871) had pursued a reading of European peasant customs as cultural analogues of prehistoric relics, he goes on to describe the strange powers encountered on his travels north as a kind of 'modern palaeolithicism'.<sup>45</sup> Greatly influenced by the work of the elder anthropologist during his formative years at Balliol College in the early 1870s, Lang's initial approach to the study of superstitions and the supernatural was one carried out along strictly Tylorian lines.<sup>46</sup> In *Custom and Myth* (1884), for example, we learn that the 'bull-roarer in Greek mysteries was a survival from the time when Greeks were in

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<sup>44</sup> Andrew Lang to Edward B. Tylor, 6 October n.d., Tylor Collection Pitt Rivers, Lang II

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Lang to Edward B. Tylor, 18 March 1897, Tylor Collection Pitt Rivers, Lang II

<sup>46</sup> Robert Crawford, 'Pater's *Renaissance*, Andrew Lang and Anthropological Romanticism', *English Literary History* 53 (1986)

the social condition of Australians' and in an essay on 'Myths and Mythologists' for 1886 he stated that 'we can explain many peculiarities of myths as survivals from an earlier social and mental condition of humanity'.<sup>47</sup> Along with the Glaswegian mythologist James George Frazer, Lang joined a cohort of anthropological thinkers who came to prominence at the close of the nineteenth century, and whose formative training was dominated by the diachronic theory of civilisation pursued by *Primitive Culture*.<sup>48</sup> Having helped to establish the Folk Lore Society in 1878, alongside G. L. Gomme, Alfred Nutt, Edward Clodd and William A. Clouston, Lang elaborated the evolutionary positivism of his Oxford fellow with regard to the origins, genealogies and development of folk tale and myth.

It was this loyalty to and enthusiasm for the comparative method, in conjunction with a certain precociousness that prompted Lang to mount a scathing critique the mythological theories of Friedrich Max Müller in 1873. An established and well-respected philologist, Müller's 'degeneration' thesis interpreted peasant customs and fantastic tales as the detritus of ancient solar myths, descended from the ancient India, now tainted and made vulgar by language.<sup>49</sup> Against this narrative of decline and in line with the progressivism of evolutionary orthodoxy, Lang argued in 'Mythology and Fairy Tales' that 'the supernatural element in these tales is more easily explained as a survival of animal worship, and of magic, than as a degraded shape of myths of the elements'.<sup>50</sup> In other words, myths were not simply handed down to and sullied by pre-modern culture; rather these narratives compose the creative heritage of early society.<sup>51</sup> As the placing of this article in the widely read and un-specialist *Fortnightly Review* gives some indication, one of his greatest services to Tylorian anthropology lay in the popular dissemination of its principles through the mainstream press, as one of his contemporaries recognised: 'Lang was to Prof. Tylor what Huxley was to Darwin [in] that his chief and more lasting work consisted in

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<sup>47</sup>Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1884), p. 134 and 'Myths and Mythologists', *The Nineteenth Century* (January 1886), 50-65 (59)

<sup>48</sup> As Robert Ackerman has demonstrated, the relationship between Frazer and Lang became increasingly inharmonious towards the close of the century, the two having diverged on the significance of totemism in the formation of religious belief, see *J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

<sup>49</sup> Robert Michalski reads this argument in terms of its correlations with Lang's engagement with popular literary culture, in 'Towards a Popular Culture: Andrew Lang's Anthropological and Literary Criticism', *Journal of American Culture* 18.3 (Fall, 1995)

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Mythology and Fairy Tales', *Fortnightly Review* (May 1873) 618-31 (622)

<sup>51</sup> See Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968) pp. 180-220

popularising the views of his master'.<sup>52</sup> His monthly 'At the Sign of the Ship' column for *Longman's Magazine* gave significant time over to charting the folkloric parallels and borrowings between 'savage' culture and European customs, and introduced a broadly composed audience to evolutionary theories of cultural development. Characterising himself as an accomplished amateur rather than a professional insider, Lang promoted anthropology as simply a particular way of observing the world, which was potentially accessible to all his readers.

However, by the date of his letter detailing 'modern palaeolithicism' in the Highlands of Scotland, Lang's thinking on the subject of phenomena like second sight had shifted significantly from the position maintained by his former teacher. Developed over a number of years, his most sustained attack on 'the current anthropological theory' arrived with *The Making of Religion* in 1898. Originally given as the University of St. Andrew's Gifford Lectures, which set out to dismantle the theory of 'animism', before moving on to critique Tylor's interpretation of the 'savage high gods', the text marked a quite radical break with not only his former mentor, but also with dominant anthropological convention. Taking issue with the argument put forward in *Primitive Culture*, that the belief in spirits is attributable to the faulted logic or primitive reasoning of savages, Lang proposed that this position is rendered unsustainable in the face of the countless of 'supernormal experiences' recounted by 'civilised people'.<sup>53</sup> As Richard Dorson has observed, 'his original evolutionary thesis, tended to fade before the realization that ghost stories seemed more congenial to Englishmen than to savages'.<sup>54</sup> Instead, he argues that 'the savage theory of the soul, may be based, at least in part, on experiences which cannot, at present be made to fit into any purely materialistic system of the universe'.<sup>55</sup>

Moving on to discuss the 'cavalier' dismissal of instances of second sight in *Primitive Culture*, Lang insisted that if one were to consider properly the 'merits' of these stories 'they may, if well attested, raise a presumption that the savage's theory has a better foundation than Mr. Tylor supposes'.<sup>56</sup> Recalling the elder anthropologist's assertion that the reality of spiritualist belief is of little import as

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<sup>52</sup> Salomon Reinach, 'Andrew Lang', *Quarterly Review*, 218 (1913) 310, quoted in *The Invention of Telepathy*, p. 161

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* [1898] (Fairfield, IA: 1<sup>st</sup> World Library, 2007), p. 30

<sup>54</sup> *The British Folklorists: A History*, p. 216

<sup>55</sup> *The Making of Religion*, p. 2

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101

either way it remains, ‘a survival and revival of savage thought, which the general tendency of civilisation and science has been to discard’, it is clear that his pupil had begun to ask very different questions of seemingly supernatural phenomena.<sup>57</sup> In an essay for the *Contemporary Review* in 1893 entitled ‘Superstition and Fact’, for instance, Lang complained that ‘Mr. Tylor’ having provided his reader with ‘abundant accounts of ‘veridical hallucinations’ and of ‘clairvoyance’ considers his ‘duty is done’, and characterised his failure to ask ‘Are these tales true, and, if so, what do they mean?’ a dire dereliction of scientific duty.<sup>58</sup> While the lengthy correspondence conducted between the two suggests the maintenance of private amicability, in public they had diverged greatly on the issue of ‘survivals’.

Seeking an institutional context for the ‘new branch of the Science of Man, the Comparative Study of Ghost Stories’, Lang turned from the Anthropological Institute to the Society for Psychical Research, which contributed a scientifically orientated language through which to address the common underpinnings of culturally and historically dispersed folk tales, customs and myths.<sup>59</sup> In an introduction provided for Alexander Mackenzie’s *The Prophecies of the Brahan Seer (Coinneach Odhar Fiosaiche)* (1899), the errant evolutionist made clear both his desire to find scientific evidence for the experiential dynamics folk myth and also the methodological difficulties inherent to this project. First published in 1877, the text composes a transcription of the predictions of a seventeenth-century seer from primarily oral accounts given in Gaelic, into published English.<sup>60</sup> According to Mackenzie’s account, ‘Sallow Kenneth’ was born in Uig on the Isle of Lewis and became renowned for his premonitory powers harnessed through the use of a divining stone.<sup>61</sup> Eventually entering into the employ of Kenneth of Kintail chief of the Clan Mackenzie, the seer incurred the displeasure of the earl’s wife the Countess Isabella, having reluctantly revealed details of her husband’s infidelities in Paris. Imprisoned in the Chanory of Ross at Fortrose on the Black Isle, the seer was found guilty of witchcraft and executed in a barrel full of burning tar, but not before he prophesied

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<sup>57</sup>Edward B. Tylor, ‘On the Survival of Savage Thought in Modern Civilisation’, *Proceedings of the Royal Institute* 5 (1869), 522-35 (528)

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘Superstition and Fact’, *Contemporary Review* (December 1893), 882-892 (884)

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘The Comparative Study of Ghost Stories’, *The Nineteenth Century* 17 (1885), 623-32 (624)

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Sutherland provides a useful account of the legend in *Ravens and Black Rain: the Story of Highland Second Sight* (1985)

<sup>61</sup>Another nineteenth-century account of the Brahan Seer is given in Sir Bernard Burke’s ‘The Fate of Seaforth’, *Vicissitudes of Families* Vol. III (London 1863), pp. 266-281

the downfall of the Seaforths.<sup>62</sup> Circulated and transmitted by the dialogic performances of Highland folk culture, Mackenzie, though avowedly sceptical as to the existence of second sight, nonetheless valorises the Brahan Prophecies as the non-institutional record of two centuries of Scottish history and a potential forecast of future events. In his introduction Lang alluded to the difficulties presented by this nineteenth-century text's status as the only primary written source on the topic: 'I vastly prefer modern cases, at first hand, and corroborated [...] to the rumours of the Brahan Seer. We can scarcely ever [...] find any evidence that the prophecies were recorded before the event'.<sup>63</sup> To insure against such methodological laxity and 'in the interests of Folk Lore, or Psychology, or both', Lang proposes that in the future, 'statements of second-sight men (they are common enough, to my personal knowledge, in Sutherland, Lochaber, and Glencoe) should be taken down before fulfilment', as without such documentation, 'the predictions, as a matter of evidence, go for nothing. We must try to discover the percentage of failures, before we can say whether the successes are not due to chance coincidence, or to misstatement or to mere imposture'.<sup>64</sup> This insistence on the need to apply more rigorous evidential standards to the study of supernatural phenomena with the goal of evaluating, 'the *modus* of second sight, "how it is done"' suggests the establishment of a new interpretive mode by which to consider the 'supernormal', predicated on the assumption that some quantifiable truth might be at stake.<sup>65</sup>

Along similar lines, in a revised edition of Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* in 1893, he asserted that a proper consideration of the text must 'have a double aspect'. On the one hand it must be 'an essay partly on folk-lore, on popular beliefs, their relation to similar beliefs in other parts of the world', but on the other 'as mental phenomena are in questions—such things as premonitions, hallucinations, abnormal or unusual experiences generally—a criticism of Mr. Kirk must verge on "Psychical Research"'.<sup>66</sup> Describing the necessary reconciliation of folklore with the newly instituted investigative paradigms of the

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<sup>62</sup> Alex Sutherland's *The Brahan Seer: The Making of a Legend* (Bern: International Academic Publishers, 2009) provides a detailed account of the patterns of circulation and publication associated with the legend, and the interpretations offered up by Enlightenment, Romantic and Victorian contexts

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Lang, 'The Brahan Seer and Second Sight' in Alexander Mackenzie, *The Prophecies of the Brahan Seer (Coinneach Odhar Fiosaiche)*, (Stirling: Cook & Wylie, 1899), p. x

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* viii

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* vi

<sup>66</sup> Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691) with comment by Andrew Lang and an introduction by R.B. Cunninghame Graham (Eneas MacKay: Stirling, 1893), p. 24

SPR, Lang proposed a new discipline: ‘psycho-folklorism’, which was envisioned as a mutually beneficial development that would bring collected myths, customs and peasant beliefs to bear upon a vastly expanded understanding of the mind. Yet within the Folk-Lore Society this call for an interdisciplinary alliance precipitated a series of rather bad tempered exchanges. In reply to Edward Clodd’s acerbic description of crystal vision as the result of a disordered liver, Lang complained in his ‘Protest of a Psycho-Folklorist’: What I cannot understand is this: as long as a savage, mediaeval, or classical belief [...] rests only on tradition it interests the folklorist. As soon as contemporary evidence of honorable men avers that the belief reposes on a fact, Folklore drops the subject’.<sup>67</sup> While for Clodd, modern spiritualist belief and the alleged phenomena of the séance could be dismissed as evincing only the tenacity of animistic belief and the excessive gullibility of the British public, for the psycho-folklorist these presented opportunities to apply scientific principle to anomalous experience. As is made clear by the snobbish distinction upheld by Clodd, between the ‘psychical researcher [who] represents a state of feeling’ and ‘the folklorist [who] represents an order of thought’, in attempting to negotiate an intellectual space for the study of ‘psychic lore’, Lang overstepped a carefully maintained disciplinary border.<sup>68</sup> This fractious exchange serves as clear example of what the sociologist Thomas Gieryn has termed ‘boundary-work’, wherein an attempt is made to demarcate scientific from non-scientific knowledge in the public realm in order to ‘enlarge the material and symbolic resources of scientists or to defend professional autonomy’.<sup>69</sup> Having only established an institutional basis in 1878, the study of folklore was itself a young and marginal science, and at least part of the reluctance to credit the proposed partnership stemmed from the perceived need to protect folklore’s already tenuous claim to orthodoxy from the taint of this new ‘bastard supernaturalism’.<sup>70</sup> Reflecting on this self-preservation in *The Making of Religion*, Lang adopted a suitably folkloric analogy to complain that ‘Anthropology adopts the airs of her elder sisters among the sciences, and is as severe as they to the Cinderella of the family, Psychical Research’.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> ‘Protest of a Psycho-Folklorist’, *Folk-Lore* (September 1895), 236-48 (247)

<sup>68</sup> Edward Clodd, ‘A Reply to the Foregoing ‘Protest’’, *Folk-Lore* (October 1895), 248-58 (258)

<sup>69</sup> Thomas F. Gieryn, ‘Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Profession Ideologies of Scientists’, *American Sociological Review* 48.6 (December, 1983) 781-95 (782)

<sup>70</sup> Edward Clodd, ‘Presidential Address’, *Folklore* (1895) 80

<sup>71</sup> *The Making of Religion*, p. 75

In the history of the ghost story given in *Cock Lane and Commonsense* (1894) a new intellectual terrain was demarcated for the reader, in which second sight was now, ‘only a Scotch name which covers many cases called telepathy and clairvoyance by psychical students, and casual or morbid hallucinations, by other people’.<sup>72</sup> Part of the appeal of psychical research was that it permitted the anthropologist to bring the universalism guiding his treatment of folklore, in which ‘similar conditions of mind produce similar practices, apart from identity of race, or borrowing of ideas and manners’, to bear upon the ‘obscure corners in the edifice of the human faculty’.<sup>73</sup> From the 1880s onwards the fabled power of second sight was subsumed by a larger epistemological project, concerned with marking out new psychical territories, in which Lang was largely complicit.<sup>74</sup> Most fully explicated in *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) a two-volume work that analysed over 700 reports of what were termed ‘crisis apparitions’, the telepathic theory of ghost seeing posed a non-pathological and largely physiological scenario: a mode of transmission or rapport established between an ‘agent’ and ‘precipitant’, in which changes in brain activity effected the nerve-centres of another person, and in turn produced visual and non-visual hallucinations. The explication of this telepathic hypothesis precipitated a significant narratological evolution in the study of prophetic or pre-visionary phenomena.<sup>75</sup> A printed correspondence in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* for example, detailed a ‘remarkable story of the faculty of second sight’, concerning the accurate prediction of a ‘Miss Jessie Wilson’s’ early arrival into Bangalore to join her missionary fiancé, as ‘seen’ by the ‘Rev. John Drake, of Arbroath’ and as verified by four independent accounts.<sup>76</sup> Though many of the narrative elements at play here replicate those found in earlier accounts of the faculty, both the emphasis on standards of evidential rigor and the analysis that frames it were peculiar to this situation. In the same volume of the house journal, Frederic Myers proposed that, ‘It is, in fact, obvious that in dealing with telepathic clairvoyance we are, so to speak, standing at a centre towards which many lines of recorded phenomena converge’ and goes on to name ‘so-called “second-sight” in the Highlands’ as composing one such connecting line.<sup>77</sup> Developed in the thousands of cases submitted to the society every year, in the

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<sup>72</sup> Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (London: Longman & Green, 1894), p. 224

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth*, p. 22 and ‘Protest of a Folklorist’, 243

<sup>74</sup> McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self*, p. 106

<sup>75</sup> Frederic Myers is credited with having coined the term from the Greek ‘tele’ (distant) and ‘pathia’ (feeling), ‘First Report of the Literary Committee’, *PSPR* 1 (1882-1883), 105

<sup>76</sup> *JSPR* 1 (July 1885), 496-8

<sup>77</sup> *JSPR* 1 (September 1884), 151-2



epistolary data processed by the Literary Committee, and in dedicated investigations like Eleanor Sidgwick's survey of premonitions in 1887, this new analytic recast the second-sighted vision in psychological terms.

Essential to the alchemy of psychical research, by which tales of the supernatural were transformed into serviceable scientific data, was the wary negotiation of language on the one hand and evidential standards on the other. The opening pages of Eleanor Sidgwick's 'On the Evidence for Premonitions', typifies the carefully measured tone struck by the Society. Having defined her subject as 'predictions or foreshadowings or warnings of coming events', the author avowed that though 'some cases are certainly very striking', there existed 'few cases' of a high 'evidential standard', a situation which may be attributed to the phenomenon's 'remoteness from the analogy of our established sciences', and which can only be partially remedied by excluding any account not given 'first-hand'.<sup>78</sup> In prescribing and managing these veridical conditions, the SPR set a new descriptive criterion for the ghost story. On the one hand, by privileging epistolary accounts and setting membership fees, the Society effectively restricted their evidence base to middle and upper class correspondents.<sup>79</sup> As such Owen Davies comments, "The SPR sources tell us little about the experiences, beliefs and legends of the rural and urban working class, in other words the majority of the population".<sup>80</sup> This exclusivity extended, moreover, to the narrative form of recounted experiences.

Beyond the requirement that personal accounts submitted to the Society for consideration be supported by the testimony of multiple witnesses or verified by their correlation with an external reality like a dated letter or newspaper report, they were also encouraged to strike a tone of detachment, which served to distinguish them from the tales and superstitions of the credulous. As an early report in the *PSPR* made clear, 'we must warn future readers that the details of the evidence are in many cases not only dull, but of a trivial and even ludicrous kind; and they will be presented for the most part in the narrator's simplest phraseology, quite unspiced for the literary palette'.<sup>81</sup> As will be more fully explicated in the following chapter, the second-sighted Gaelic speaking Highlander interviewed by Lang 'through an

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<sup>78</sup> Eleanor Sidgwick, 'On Evidence for Premonitions', *PSPR* 5 (1887), 288-354 (288-9)

<sup>79</sup> *The Invention of Telepathy*, p. 56

<sup>80</sup> Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 9

<sup>81</sup> William F. Barrett, A. P. Perceval Keep, C. C. Massey *et al.*, 'First Report of the Committee on Haunted Houses', *PSPR* 1 (1882-1883), 118

interpreter', did not constitute the archetype of a reliable witness.<sup>82</sup> This is not to suggest that the phenomena does not appear in the pages of the *JSPR*, but rather that it did so only under carefully managed and class based conditions: an instance of 'second sight' is recounted by a 'Mr. Pierce of Chelmsford' for instance, or a classic case of the 'Highland' phenomena is given by the respected 'Colonel Campbell' with the supporting testimony of honourable 'Captain Macneal'.<sup>83</sup> By expunging certain voices from their records, namely those not affiliated with a dominant literate culture, the SPR sought to distance itself from narrative forms attached to the oral, the folkloric and the popular.

It was in this strained interaction between the supernatural lore associated with the peripheries and the scientific ghosts being established by an exclusive intellectual community in the metropole, that Lang's sympathies with the project of psychical research began to come under pressure. Implicit in 'psycho-folklorism' was a critique of not only the unwillingness of anthropologists to properly attend to the 'evidence' for faculties like 'Second Sight', but also of the SPR's refusal to countenance either 'old accounts of the phenomena which it investigates at present' or the testimony gathered from those at the imperial margin: 'Psychical Research', he complained, has 'no use for savages, who cannot be cross-examined at 20 Hanover Square or by emissaries from that scientific centre'.<sup>84</sup> Situated at an intersection between several strands of intellectual activity towards which he proffered allegiance, the ghost story signifies something more than the procedural accounts published by the SPR could account for. Writing in *Cock Lane and Commonsense*, he complained that the methodical exactitude with which the SPR approached the study of ghostly phenomena had exercised a largely pernicious influence on the modern supernatural tale. Compared to the 'positively garrulous' apparitions uncovered by seventeenth-century writers like Joseph Glanvill, the ghost haunting the pages of the *PSPR* was, by Lang's estimate, a rather 'purposeless creature. He appears nobody knows why; he has no message to deliver, no secret crime to reveal, no appointment to keep, no treasure to discover, no commissions to be executed, and, as an almost invariable

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<sup>82</sup> Andrew Lang to Edward B. Tylor, 6 October n.d., Tylor Collection Pitt Rivers, Lang II

<sup>83</sup> *JSPR* 2 (June, 1886), 334-5 and *JSPR* 2 (September, 1885), 43-5

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Comparative Psychical Research', *Contemporary Review* (September 1893) and 'Last Words on Totemism, Marriage and Religion', *Folklore* 23.3 (Sept. 1912), 377

rule, he does not speak, even when you speak to him'.<sup>85</sup> This narrative incompatibility was, moreover, mutually contaminative, and in an article for the *Contemporary Review* he complained that from the perspective of psychological research, 'Good evidence is becoming more difficult to attain', as the reading public are now schooled in the 'genuine symptoms of telepathy' by fictions written 'along psychological lines'.<sup>86</sup> Popular publications like William T. Stead's *Real Ghost Stories* (1899) or the supernatural tales of Fitz-James O'Brien, which adhere too closely to the precepts of psychological research are accused of providing their readers with a form of narrative training that undermined the authenticity or 'honesty' of the accounts submitted to the SPR.<sup>87</sup> Underlying jocular tone of these statements was a serious concern with what violence may be enacted by the expansion of a positivist regime into the territory traditionally occupied by imagination and fantasy, the 'free space' untouched by science 'where Romance may still try an unimpeded flight'.<sup>88</sup>

For their part, some members of the SPR took issue with what they perceived as the clouding influence of a romantic temperament detectable in their fellow researcher's habitual criticisms. In a review of *The Making of Religion* in the *PSPR* for example, Frank Podmore—an active psychological researcher and co-author of *Phantasms of the Living*—complained the text composed only 'restored', aesthetically pleasing 'psychical bric-a-brac'.<sup>89</sup> Writing in relation to Lang's dismissal of Leonora Piper, a trance medium upon whom the SPR and specifically Richard Hodgson carried out an extensive investigation, Podmore attributed the psycho-folklorist's 'curiously inadequate appreciation' of the evidence to the form in which the séance transcripts were published: because the 'trance utterances are presented in their original crudity, with repetitions, incoherencies, loose tags' in place, they present to stark a contrast 'to the smooth and finished narratives with which Mr. Lang has so often delighted himself and us'.<sup>90</sup> By this formulation, Lang was unwilling to properly

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<sup>85</sup> *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1894), p. 94. This complaint is repeated in *The Book of Dreams and Ghosts* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), in which Lang contrasts the purposeless modern ghost to older ghosts who 'knew what they wanted, asked for it, and saw they got it' (110)

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Superstition and Fact', *Contemporary Review* (December 1893) 882-892 (886)

<sup>87</sup> William T. Stead (1849-1912), the pioneering journalist, social campaigner and owner of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Review of Reviews* and an important participant in spiritualist cultures of late nineteenth century. The following chapter deals in more detail with Stead and his contribution to psychological research

<sup>88</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Ghosts up to Date', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 155 (January 1894), 47-58 (56-7)

<sup>89</sup> Frank Podmore, 'Review of *The Making of Religion*', *PSPR* 14 (1898), 128-139 (131)

<sup>90</sup> Critiqued here is Lang's avowed lack of interest in Richard Hodgson's 'A Further Record of Observations of Certain Phenomena of Trance', *PSPR* 13 (1897-8), in which Hodgson had admitted

interpret the data available and by extension unable to proffer an informed opinion on Mrs. Piper's mediumship, because as raw evidence it lacks narrative linearity or poetic nicety.<sup>91</sup> As such he had failed to adequately embody or perform the conditions of 'objective' scientific research, having instead privileged the subjective pleasures of literary form. Discussing his treatment of crystal vision, Edward Clodd articulates something of this conflict when he suggests that, 'it seems clear that Dr. Lang has not made up his mind where to place these phenomena' while he appears to suggest that 'they may be capable of scientific explanation [...] he is evidently hampered by the feeling that, possibly, they may lie within the domain of the supernatural'.<sup>92</sup> The methodological in-exactitude that Podmore perceived as the 'psycho-folklorist's' weakness could be rather interpreted as an expression of his reluctance to submit fully to either the naturalist paradigm informing the work of the Society or more generally, to the performative strictures of this particular observational regime. Refusing the statistician Karl Pearson's assertion that 'the scientific man has above all things to strive at self-elimination in his judgements', Lang did little to disguise the spectre of the literary critic, the romancer and the novelist haunting his psychical work.<sup>93</sup>

Balancing repeated calls for science to direct its attention to the objective study of unexplained human faculties, or what Lang terms the 'X region of our nature', was a detectable anxiety with what the encroachment of the empiricist project might mean for the imagination itself.<sup>94</sup> As Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay has captured, 'On the one hand, he seemed to be asking that science account for such occurrences, while at the same time he implied that any explanation it was likely to give would be futile, no more than an explaining away'.<sup>95</sup> His occasional frustration with the SPR should be understood as symptomatic of this duality: while their investigative rigor served to validate supernatural phenomena as a worthy area of academic study, the application of scientifically orientated language to the realms of the mysterious and

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himself to be 'fully convinced that there has been such actual communication through Mrs. Piper's trance' (357)

<sup>91</sup> Specifically critiqued here is Lang's reaction to 'Dr. Hodgson's last Report' or Richard Hodgson's 'A Further Record of Observations of Certain Phenomena of Trance', *PSPR* 13 (1897-8) in which he admitted himself to be 'fully convinced that there has been such actual communication through Mrs. Piper's trance' (357)

<sup>92</sup> Edward Clodd, 'Crystal Gazing', *Folklore* (September 1906), 373-374 (374)

<sup>93</sup> Karl Pearson, *The Grammar of Science* (London: Walter Scott, 1892), pp. 7-8

<sup>94</sup> *The Making of Religion*, p. 30

<sup>95</sup> Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860-1915* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2010), p. 127

the undiscovered threatened to undermine the imaginative value of those cultural sites. Though where it suited his purpose he was willing to concede to a purely ‘psychical’ reading, as when he describes second sight in ‘Superstition and Fact’ as ‘a state between telepathy and clairvoyance’, such concessions were usually undercut by the reiteration of a value system existing beyond that captured by the empirical. In recognition of the close articulation of literary and scientific themes in his *Longman’s* column, George Stocking has usefully proposed that romance functioned as a ‘kind of sublimated anthropology’ for Lang.<sup>96</sup> Yet the reverse is equally true. In that, ethnological activities like data collection and tabulation were undertaken not only with the creative needs of the romantic novelist in mind, but also on the assurance that the romance novelist’s treatment of this material might better reflect its irrational or primal underpinnings.

Nowhere are the complexities of this position more apparent than in his treatment of Scottish folklore and in particular, in the recurrence of the second-sight tradition across his psychical, anthropological, historical, journalistic and literary writings. Accounts of uncanny foresight and symbolical visions in the Highlands clearly sustained Lang’s attention over the claims of London mediums like Mrs. Piper, and this is attributable to their specific national, historical and literary mappings. Despite residing in England for most of his working life, the Oxford-educated *litterateur* retained a strong sense of a peculiarly Scottish cultural identity, made apparent by the large body of writing he dedicated to it: a four-volume *History of Scotland* (1900-1907), a series of fictionalised biographies of famous Scottish figures, several edited collections of poetry, and a number of works dedicated to his Border compatriot, Sir Walter Scott.<sup>97</sup> Beyond the nostalgic longing for home common to the exile, this corpus of work existed on the assumption that there was some collective spirit or *geist* unique to Scottish vernacular culture. This sense of northern exceptionalness precipitated some theoretical inconsistencies in his anthropological thinking.

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<sup>96</sup> George Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), p. 52

<sup>97</sup> Lang’s writing on Scotland include, but are not limited to, the following: *St. Andrews* (1893), *Memoir of Robert F. Murray* (1894), *A Monk of Fife* (1895), *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* (1896), *The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart* (1896), *Pickle and the Spy; or, the Incognito of Prince Charles* (1897), *Waiting on the Glesca Train* (1898), *The Poems and Ballads of Sir Walter Scott* (1900), *The Mystery of Mary Stuart* (1901), *James IV and the Gowrie Mystery* (1902), *John Knox and the Reformation* (1905), *The Clyde Mystery: A Study in Forgeries and Folklore* (1905), *The Portrait and Jewels of Mary Stuart* (1906), *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1906), *Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy* (1910) and posthumously, *Highways and Byways of the Border* (1913)

Undercutting the comparative thesis pursued by studies like *Magic and Religion* (1901) and *Custom and Myth* (1884), which stated that similar ‘conditions of mind produce similar practices, apart from the identity of the race, or borrowing of ideas and manners’, Lang insisted upon the Scottish temperament or psyche as inherently different from that of dominant anglicised culture.<sup>98</sup> This distinction is most clearly played out in terms of folklore and its potentially analogous relation to both the characteristics and shared priorities of a given nation. Having claimed that it was the ‘characteristic misfortune of the English people’ to have lost the fairy tales, customs and oral history of their ancestors, Lang proposed in the *Folk Lore Record*, that to have kept them was ‘a characteristic good fortune of the Scottish people’; and elsewhere he accuses the English nation of having abandoned their old ‘poetical beliefs’ where Scotland has strived to keep these alive.<sup>99</sup> This ‘foray into national tradition runs’, Dorson has suggested, ‘strangely counter to his ‘damnable iteration’ of the universal traits in folklore’; apparent in his treatment of Scottish customs and stories was a concern with issues of ownership and authenticity, not detectable in discussions of folk customs common to other countries.<sup>100</sup>

To give an unpublished example, in a series of letters to the St. Andrews lexicographer William A. Craigie regarding the ‘vardögr’ written in 1912, Lang took issue with his former colleague’s treatment of this purportedly ‘Norwegian’ folk myth. Conducted in the weeks leading up to the publication of an article on the subject in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, in which the Norse philologist gave an account of the tradition in light of the development of ‘premonition or foreknowledge’ having ‘in recent years become a subject of serious study’, the correspondence concerned the supposed cultural specificity of this phantom double that precedes a person, arriving in locations or partaking in activities before its owner does.<sup>101</sup> Though the letters are courteous in tone, Lang was clearly perturbed by the geographical particularity Craigie had ascribed the phenomenon, ‘it is odd indeed’ he writes ‘that you have not heard of plenty in this county’.<sup>102</sup> While he was willing to concede that it ‘seems more common in Norway’ and that this is ‘proved by its possessing a name in ordinary talk, whereas

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<sup>98</sup> Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1884), p. 22

<sup>99</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘Cinderella and the Diffusion of Tales’, *Folklore* 4 (1893) and ‘At the Sign of the Ship’, *Longman’s* (November 1886) 109

<sup>100</sup> *The British Folklorists*, p. 219

<sup>101</sup> William A. Craigie, ‘The Norwegian ‘Vardögr’, *Blackwood’s Magazine* (March 1912) 304-315 (304)

<sup>102</sup> Andrew Lang to William A. Craigie, 29 February 1912, Andrew Lang Collection St. Andrews MS 36911

[Frederic] Myers for the same thing here had to invent a term', he also reminded his fellow Scot that 'for Mr. Kirk, in his Secret Commonwealth (about 1690), the thing had a name, the Co-walker'.<sup>103</sup> Further, not only had he procured 'firsthand cases of V. from Rev Mr. MacInnes, Glencoe', he could also cite, in addition to 'any number of modern cases, many from my own friends, others in the S.P.R', an instance of the phenomena in his own family, 'I remembered that my father had a V. which I never knew till one of my brothers told me he heard'.<sup>104</sup> Interpreted through the complex negotiation of proximity and distance, his discussion of the 'vardögr' brought personal experience and family history to bear upon a detached scholarly appreciation. Although willing to concede some ground to psychical research, Lang culled his examples not from the pages of *Phantasms of the Living*—a text stuffed full of ghostly doubles—but from a seventeenth-century tract on second sight and the Scottish fairy tradition.

Writing in *Magic and Religion*, Lang claimed that while 'many Englishmen or Lowlanders are unable to extract legends of fairies, ghosts and second-sight from Gaelic Highlanders', they are 'kind enough to communicate to me plenty of their folktales'.<sup>105</sup> At stake here is the careful negotiation of two observational strategies: he lays claim to a body of privileged knowledge that is not apparent to the gaze of an outside perspective, at the same time as he re-asserted his position as an informed field researcher capable of tabulating and processing this data. This dynamic has particular bearing on the taxonomic discourses of psychical research, which could be read as tending to impose a rationalising framework calculated in the metropole on traditions and systems of meaning formed in opposition to such hegemonies. In an article printed in *The Celtic Magazine* in 1887, for example, we are told that though the 'Psychical Society' had recently provided a 'scientific or quasi-scientific' explanation for the Scottish wraith, this had little effect upon the experience of ghost seeing, as the 'Highlands are full of stories about phantoms of the living; but the Highlanders would not by any means restrict these phantoms to mere cases of impending death or present crisis'.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> AL to WC, 4 March 1912, Andrew Lang Collection St. Andrews MS 6912

<sup>104</sup>AL to WC, 29 February 1912 MS 36911 and 8 March 1912 ms36914 Andrew Lang Collection St. Andrews MS36914

<sup>105</sup> Andrew Lang, *Magic and Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901) p. 58

<sup>106</sup> *The Celtic Magazine* (May 1, 1887), 324-332

Along similar lines, in his discussion of Robert Kirk's 'metaphysic of the Fairy world', Lang proposed that though 'second sight is now called telepathy' this denomination does not 'essentially advance our knowledge of the subject', as the faculty connotes 'a belief and system' that preceded and exceeded the boundaries of this categorisation.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, framing his insistence that we must recognise Kirk as 'an early student in folk-lore and psychical research' concerned with 'mental phenomena', was dedicatory verse given in Scots, to Robert Louis Stevenson. Characterised as a descendant of Kirk—who is described as 'Chaplain to the Fairy Queen'—Stevenson is charged here with keeping the strangeness and imaginative potentials of Scottish supernaturalism alive for modern readers: 'O Louis! you that like them maist/ Ye're far frae kelpie, wraith, and ghaist/ And fairy dames, no unco chaste,/ And haunted cell/ Among a heathen clan ye're placed/ That kens na hell!'.<sup>108</sup> In the same moment in which Lang asserted the psychical reality of second sight, or at the least the value in approaching the phenomena as potentially grounded in reality, he claimed it for the romance and, as his use of Scots over English makes clear, for the Scottish national imagination.<sup>109</sup>

Taking up a familiar position against the pretensions of realist fiction in *Adventures Among Books* (1901), Lang queried why it is that 'as science becomes more cock-sure' and 'the visible world is measured, mapped, tested, weighed, we seem to hope more and more that a world of invisible romance may not be far from us?'<sup>110</sup> For the exiled devotee of Walter Scott and Stevenson, this world is one located geographically and temporally in a richly imagined vision of Scotland, culled from childhood memories and the early vivid 'impression' of 'fairy tales, and chap books about Robert Burns, William Wallace and Rob Roy'.<sup>111</sup> A description given of a fishing expedition in the Scottish Borders captures the powerful position held by this imaginative landscape: the waters are 'haunted by old legends, musical with old songs'

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<sup>107</sup> 'Superstition and Fact', *The Contemporary Review* (Dec. 1893), 882-892 and Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* with comment by Andrew Lang and an introduction by R.B. Cunninghame Graham (Eneas MacKay: Stirling, 1893), p. 55

<sup>108</sup> Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* with comment by Andrew Lang and an introduction by R.B. Cunninghame Graham (Eneas MacKay: Stirling, 1893), pp. 23-24

<sup>109</sup> As Roger Lancelyn Green has demonstrated, Lang's multiple treatments of the fairy tale tradition marks a break from Shakespearian iterations and the folk tales of 'Grimm and Dascent' to return to the 'gloomy horrors of the Scottish Fairyland [...] His fairies are the dark, subterranean people of Northern superstitions', 'Andrew Lang and the Fairy Tale', *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language* 20 (1994) 228

<sup>110</sup> Andrew Lang, *Adventures Among Books* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), p. 116

<sup>111</sup> *Adventures Among Books*, p. 5



and the days so 'lovely that they sometimes in the end begat a superstitious eeriness. One seemed forsaken in an enchanted world; one might see the two white fairy deer flit by, brings to us as to Thomas the Rhymer, the tidings that we must back to Fairyland'.<sup>112</sup> In a recent analysis of the coloured fairy books, Sara M. Hines has proposed that not only did Lang conceive of Scotland as 'distinct and separate from England' but that he 'incorporated two Scotlands within the same landscape: the real and the fairy'.<sup>113</sup> In line with the geographical co-ordinates espoused by Robert Kirk, in which the seer served as an emissary from the human world to the subterranean fairy realm, Lang understood his homeland in terms of similar border space between wild and civilised locales. Reading this imagined boundary into the conditions of the late-Victorian romance, the literary historian Penny Fielding has drawn attention to the centrality of an imagined Scotland, 'organized round the unstable polarities of orality and literacy' in informing Lang's defence of the genre over the aesthetic claims of realism or naturalism. Fielding finds this expressed in two recurrent sites of inquiry: firstly in his conception of the 'traditional hero' who is 'Scottish, warlike, and out of doors' and whose adventures are communicated through the wholesome oral culture of the ballad, and secondly in his frequent return to the folklore and supernatural tales of his homeland as evidential of privileged 'primitive racial inheritance'.<sup>114</sup> It is because of this genealogy, stretching through traditions of oral history, bardic traditions and culturally embedded supernaturalism, that Scottish readers composed the romance novel's 'natural' readership.

Reading the recommendation that Edward B. Tylor should visit the second-sighted men of Glencoe if he wants 'to see 'Primitive Culture'', alongside the claim made in *Custom and Myth* that Scotland maintained traces of a 'stage of thought which is dying out in Europe but which still exists in other parts of the world', it seems prudent to position the 'psycho-folklorist' in the intellectual tradition sketched out by the previous chapter; in which race theory and cultural evolutionism conspired to consign a feminised, savage and politically impotent Celt to the realm of the

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<sup>112</sup>Andrew Lang quoted in Green, *Andrew Lang: A Critical Biography*, p. 7. In the 'A Border Boyhood' Green also emphasises the influence of Lang's Scottish upbringing in informing his later interests in folklore, fairytale and second sight

<sup>113</sup> Sara M. Hines, 'Narrating Scotland: Andrew Lang's Coloured Fairy Book Collection, *The Gold of Fairnilee*, and 'A Creefull of Celtic Stories' in *Folklore and Nationalism During the Long Nineteenth Century* eds. Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin (Leiden, Netherlands: IDC Publishers, 2012) pp. 207-226 (209)

<sup>114</sup> Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 142-143

imaginative or the spiritual.<sup>115</sup> There is an important distinction to be drawn, however, between the model of primitivism at stake in Ernest Renan or Matthew Arnold's vision of 'Gaelic genius' and those at play in this later valorisation of Scotland as one of the romance genre's 'free space[s]'. Where Arnold found in his 'undisciplined, anarchical and turbulent' Celt a dreamy spirituality that is always ready to 'react against the despotism of fact', late-Victorian romancers like Stevenson, Kenneth Graham, J. M. Barrie and W.E. Henley unearthed a virile spirit of masculine adventure in the country's history, traditions and mythologies.<sup>116</sup> In doing so these writers colluded in *and* subverted the implicit hierarchies of anthropological practice, so that the Scot's 'primitive racial inheritance' composes a vital force capable of regenerating British literary culture.

Moreover, thinking again of the common conflation of foreign 'savages' with the children of the Western world, it is significant that the rhetoric of the romance novel relies upon the valorisation of childhood as an Edenic and privileged space. While for Tylor this comparison illustrated the unrefined nature of the 'moral character' and 'intellectual condition' of the 'primitive' and the child, for Lang it served to evince the existence of some essential creative drive or imaginative power destroyed by the civilising force of adulthood.<sup>117</sup> Picking up upon the idea of a 'primitive' reader, the next section of this chapter considers how another ancestral Scot, the best-selling novelist Marie Corelli, effectively utilised both scientific and folkloric categories in the production of psychically 'wholesome' and spiritually redemptive fictions. Here the discussion moves from a direct engagement with second sight, to interrogate the fashioning of a seer-artist for a new mass market and how this modelling might be said to represent a progression from the popular prophecies associated with the Highland tradition.

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<sup>115</sup> *Custom and Myth*, p. 67

<sup>116</sup> Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1867), p. 154, 155, vii, viii

<sup>117</sup> *Primitive Culture* vol. 1, p. 27. In the essay 'King Romance in *Longman's Magazine*: Andrew Lang and Literary Populism', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 44.4 (Winter 2011) 354-376, Julia Reid has similarly argued that Lang's 'questioned the evolutionary narrative of progress from childhood to adulthood, oral to written culture, romance to realism' and while accepting 'the common belief that children recapitulated humankind's racial development, he inverted evolutionists' hierarchies' (359)

#### 4.2 MARIE CORELLI AND SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE

In reply to a query from a reader regarding the defining themes of British fiction, the journalist William T. Stead postulated in 1897 that ‘the Psychic problem is already submerging Mudie’s and the circulating libraries [and] the immense field which the psychic opens up to the modern novelist is at last beginning to be appreciated’.<sup>118</sup> The ‘immense field’ revealed by large-scale investigations like *Phantasms of the Living* and the pages of the *PSPR* made public an extensive body of meticulously documented accounts of ghost seeing, uncanny foreseeing, doubled personalities, trance states, death wraiths, crystal vision, inspired clairvoyance and many other formally supernatural phenomena. Writing in *Modernism and Romance* (1908), the literary critic Rolf A. Scott-James noted ‘how nearly akin’ psychical research is to ‘Romance’. Recognising a border between ‘the visible, sensible world’ and the realm occupied by fiction ‘that vague sphere whence and whither all our imaginings, ideals and dreams of perfectibility seem to pass’, he proposed that this boundary line has now ‘been given a technical meaning by psychologists, who which to distinguish between different kinds of consciousness which have been found to exist in the human personality’.<sup>119</sup>

While Scott-James credited Robert Louis Stevenson with having best utilised the language of the ‘subliminal’ and the ‘supernormal’ as a ‘channel for literature through the shoals of a scientific age’, the *Borderland* article pointed instead to ‘Marie Corelli’ as a ‘pioneer in this field’.<sup>120</sup> The imagery and thematics of the ‘psychical’, frequently conflated with the ‘psychological’, composed a dominant feature in many of her fantastical narratives. In a *Romance of Two Worlds* (1886) a neurasthenic musician takes a healing journey to other worlds guided by the telepathic abilities of a mesmeric Eastern scientist; in *Ardat: The Story of a Dead Self* (1889) a poet restores his creativity by connecting with his subliminal selves; in *The Soul of Lilith* (1892) a young woman is held in a trance-like state and *The Life Everlasting* views the question of immortality through the prism of ‘psychic impressions and memories’.<sup>121</sup> Though these motifs habitually resonate a little of the gothic potential realised in the work of writers like Stevenson, more often Corelli allied the deepened knowledge of the mind

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<sup>118</sup> *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index of Psychic Phenomena*, 4 (January 1897), 117

<sup>119</sup> Rolfe Arnold Scott-James, *Modernism and Romance* (London: John Lane, 1980), pp. 237-8

<sup>120</sup> *Modernism and Romance*, p. 237 and *Borderland*, 117

<sup>121</sup> Marie Corelli, *The Life Everlasting: A Reality of Romance* (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 29

promised by psychical research with the possibility of religious and spiritual affirmation. As has been recognised in several critical treatments of her work, common to these fictions is an educative imperative through which popular science, with its intricacies and dimly perceived dangers, is transformed into a means of uncovering and making tangible the Divine.<sup>122</sup>

In a letter to her publisher in April 1888, Corelli remarked ‘Do you notice what an immense eagerness there is at the present day to read everything connected with religion and psychology?’.<sup>123</sup> Though it is unprofitable to reduce the author’s extensive treatment of these topics to only an expression of keen commercial acumen, this observation does establish a useful correlation between ‘popular’ literary taste and the thematic territories staked out by her metaphysical fables. Having assured her readers that, ‘Religion and science, viewed broadly, do not clash so much as they combine. To the devout and deeply studious mind, the marvels of science are the truths of religion manifest’, her novels pursued an ontology that transfused traditional Christianity with Eastern mysticism and contemporary theories concerning thermodynamics, electromagnetism, human evolution and psychology.<sup>124</sup> Recalling Lang’s complaint that the designation of second sight as a form of ‘telepathy’ failed to encompass its local status as ‘a belief and a system’, it should be noted that in producing her own ‘system’ Corelli borrowed extensively from psychical research without colluding in its cosmologies.<sup>125</sup> In *Authors of the Impossible* (2010), Jeffrey J. Kripal draws a distinction between ‘the categories of the mystical and the spiritual’ which ‘selectively return to historical religious sources for the creative construction of what amounts to a new religious vision’, and the ‘categories of the psychical’ which attempt ‘to move out from the religious register, advancing instead strong scientific or parascientific claims and connotations’.<sup>126</sup> Reading the former as also allied to a romantic ‘free space’ not necessarily inflected with overt theological meaning, Kripal’s division provides us with a useful lens through which to consider fissures in the

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<sup>122</sup> See for example Robyn Hallim, ‘Marie Corelli’s Best-Selling Electric Creed’, *Women’s Writing* 13.2 (2006) 267-283, Nickianne Moody, ‘Moral Uncertainty and the Afterlife: Explaining the Popularity of Marie Corelli’s Early Novels’ *Women’s Writing* 13.2 (2006) 188-205 and Anne Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

<sup>123</sup> Marie Corelli- to George Bentley 20 April 1888 quoted in Federico, *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture*, p. 130

<sup>124</sup> Marie Corelli, *Free Opinions Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Social Life and Conduct* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1905), p. 193

<sup>125</sup> *The Secret Commonwealth*, p. 55

<sup>126</sup> Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 47

relationship between fiction and science in the late nineteenth century. In novels like *A Romance of Two Worlds* or *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* Corelli circumvented this tonal disjuncture by forcing the language of experimental psychology into the service of an avowedly religious vision. Most clearly realised her 'Electric Creed', as developed across seven novels, which re-writes Christian doctrine along thermodynamic lines with the aim of uniting 'Art, Science and Posey', Corelli's syncretism largely refused the boundaries between religious and scientific registers.<sup>127</sup>

As is revealed by William T. Stead's endorsement of her as 'pioneer in this field', it is arguable that in seeking to reconcile science with religion Corelli only brought to the surface what was already at stake in the psychical project itself: namely, the investigation of the possibility of the soul's survival of physical death. Made explicit by the posthumous publication of *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903), the pursuit of new psychological territories was one shadowed by what this study's author described as, 'an agnosticism or virtual materialism which sometimes was a dull pain borne with joyless doggedness, sometimes flashed into a horror of reality that made the world spin before ones eyes'.<sup>128</sup> For Frederic Myers and other members of the SPR, experimental evidence gathered from the boundaries of consciousness or the 'sub-conscious strata of the human intelligence', potentially composed evidence of 'a spiritual universe, co-existing with, and manifesting itself through, the material universe which we know'.<sup>129</sup> Considering the historian Samuel Hynes's description of Myers as having sought the immortal soul but found the 'subconscious' instead, it is possible to interpret the religious trance narrative of *A Romance of Two Worlds* or the psycho-spiritual progression delineated by *The Life Everlasting* as having dramatised and validated these poorly disguised immortal longings.<sup>130</sup> At times Corelli appeared to endorse this reading of her authorial intentions. Reflecting upon the publication of her first novel, of instance, she framed its wildly metaphysical plot as 'the simply worded narration of a singular psychical experience'; while in the prologue to a later novel she went further to attribute her entire literary career to a formative 'strange psychical experience'; and elsewhere she claimed authoritative knowledge of 'Psychic Science' and the 'right to express'

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<sup>127</sup>Marie Corelli, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (London: Bentley, 1886), p. 300 and see Robyn Hallim, 'Marie Corelli's Best-Selling Electric Creed', *Women's Writing* 13.2 (2006), 267-283

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Frederic Myers, *Science and a Future Life, with Other Essays* 2 Vols. (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 36 and *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, vol. 1 xxii p. 534

<sup>130</sup>Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Frame of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 15

herself on the subject.<sup>131</sup> However, while the author was at times willing to concede to the language or categories of thought instituted by this new science, this seeming endorsement was tempered by an insistence upon, what she perceived as, the flawed logic guiding its investigations into the possibility of immortality.

Situating her authorial project in relation to the discoveries of late nineteenth-century science, Corelli negotiated a seemingly appositional philosophical position. At the same time as she assured her reader that, 'Religion and science, viewed broadly, do not clash so much as they combine', her fictions evinced a deeply felt ambivalence regarding the quest to obtain positive knowledge of the unseen or the spiritual. The gothic plot of *The Soul of Lilith*, for example, in which a young girl is held in a trance-like state between life and death in order to report back on the afterlife to her scientist captor, could be read as an allegory of psychical folly. Through the use of a 'crystal disc' Lilith is able to communicate with other planets and returns to the Eastern atheist El-Rami with reports of God and enchanted spirit realms where 'many thousands of people [...] danced and gave thanks in the everlasting sunshine, and knelt in crowds upon their wide and fruitful fields to thank the Giver of life immortal'.<sup>132</sup> Yet her reports from the afterlife elicit only incredulity from her captor, whose contemptible empiricism demands proof of the unseen but precludes his belief in it.<sup>133</sup> Where for the agnostic Myers 'whether or no he has an immortal soul' constituted a troubling question that might be answered by science, for Corelli such an inquiry only demonstrated the extremes of materialist arrogance.<sup>134</sup> With this in mind it is perhaps unsurprising that, in spite of her adherence to elements of its theology and imageries, the author maintained a consistently hostile position towards spiritualism's claim to offer tangible proof of the afterlife. Having claimed, 'I am neither a "Spiritualist" nor a "Theosophist" [...] I have no other supernatural faith than that which is taught by the Founder of our Faith', Corelli questioned the 'considerable attention' paid by the SPR to 'mediumistic trickery, automatic writing and the like' and to bemoan the involvement of 'brilliant scientist[s]' like the physicist

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<sup>131</sup> *My First Book: The Experiences of Walter Besant and Others* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1894), p. 207  
Marie Corelli, *The Life Everlasting: A Reality of Romance* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 12 and 'Deceiving the Very Elect: A Comment on "Spiritualism"' 1920 MS Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-Upon-Avon

<sup>132</sup> Marie Corelli, *The Soul of Lilith* (London: Methuen & Co., 1892), p. 35

<sup>133</sup> See Jill Galvan, 'Christians, Infidels and Women's Channeling in the Writings of Marie Corelli', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31.1 (2003), 83-97

<sup>134</sup> *Human Personality*, p. 1

Oliver Lodge in spiritualist investigations'.<sup>135</sup> Laid out here is not a critique of 'science' as such, but rather a disavowal of the primacy of sensory or otherwise quantifiable evidence as a key to spiritual 'truths'.

The phenomenal commercial success of novels like *The Soul of Lilith* rested upon their careful negotiation of conflicting systems of popular and scientific belief, which affirmed the existence of realms beyond the everyday while disavowing the empiricist pretensions of the spiritualist movement, borrowed from the mysticism of the Theosophy movement but claimed to preach only Christian orthodoxies, and adopted scientific terminologies to denounce modern materialism. One approach to understanding how these seemingly disparate thematic components are brought into coherence is to recognise these novels as, at their core, romances of the romance genre itself.<sup>136</sup> This generic self-reflexivity draws an equivalency between the materialist blindness of 'scientists, scraping at the crust-covering of the mine of knowledge, and learning of its hidden treasure about as much as might be measured with a finger-nail' and the 'degrading' effects of 'coarse "realism"' in fiction.<sup>137</sup> Thematically preoccupied with *other* worlds, Corelli visions of the remote past, exotic orient and mysterious spirit realms encoded a conscious rebuttal of the aesthetic conditions of the realist novel. Reading Corelli's portrayal of Ouida's work as an expression of 'beautiful *fact*', alongside George Levine's description of literary realism as entailing 'the moral enterprise of truth telling' that aims to make literature appear to describe 'reality itself', it is clear that the popular novelist wrote in pursuit of a different kind of 'real'.<sup>138</sup> Described by a reviewer in 1901 as of 'an audacious hugeness, an eye-smiting enormity of dimensions so gross as to nearly physical', her novels dealt in a language of affective intensities, moral extremes and hyperbolic melodrama, far removed from the stylistic traits of what we would normally consider to be typical of realist fiction.<sup>139</sup> Yet in line with other late nineteenth-century romancers, Corelli's theorisation of her own critical practice consistently emphasised its adherence to a 'plain truth' indexical to deeper psychological realities. In *Ardath*:

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<sup>135</sup> Marie Corelli, quoted in Phillip Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 776, *The Life Everlasting*, pp. 64-5 and 'Deceiving the Very Elect: A Comment on "Spiritualism"'

<sup>136</sup> See Martin Hipsky, 'The Corelli Romance *contra* Modernity: *The Treasure of Heaven and Innocent*', *Women's Writing* 13.2 (2006) 206-224

<sup>137</sup> Marie Corelli, 'The Social Blight' in *Free Opinions Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Modern Social Life and Conduct* (London: Archibald Constable & Co Ltd, 1905), p. 80 and 'A Little Talk About Literature'

<sup>138</sup> George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. 8 and 'A Word about "Ouida"', 366

<sup>139</sup> Arnold Bennett, *Fame and Fiction* (New York: Dutton, 1901), p. 83

*The Story of a Dead Self* the poet protagonist clearly voices the judgement of his author when he opines that, ‘viewed rightly, Realism would become Romance and Romance Realism’ because the ‘Commonplace is not the Real’. Using the example of ‘a ragged woman in the streets picking up scraps of her daily food’, he proposes that though this may appear ‘realistic’, because our appreciation of the scene does not attend to what the ‘Inner Self HAS experienced, or IS experiencing’, it can hold no claim to the ‘Real’.<sup>140</sup> Aligned with Frederic Jameson’s description of romance as ‘the place of narrative heterogeneity and of freedom from that reality principle to which a now oppressive realist representation is the hostage’, this re-formulation of objectivity sought to privilege insight into the unseen over the claims of the empirically verifiable.<sup>141</sup>

Warming to this theme in a speech given to the Royal Historical Society in 1901, she proposed that ‘these things we call “imaginative” are often far more real than what we call “realism”, but that in the rush of modern life where we ‘are forever wandering up and down’ this essential knowledge might be lost.<sup>142</sup> In order to preserve, what Corelli terms, the nation’s ‘inward sight’ popular literature must present ‘the idealisation of human thought into Ideal language’ and ‘lift the aspirations of man upward—not to drag them downward’.<sup>143</sup> Because, she writes ‘some of our fellow-creatures there are in these days who can only be reached through the medium of “romance”’, it has proved necessary to ‘raise the great art of romance, i.e., the art of idealising a given subject like a sculptor or a painter by means of words’ in order ‘to persuade people to pause awhile and think’.<sup>144</sup> Presenting the world not as it is, but as it should be, inspires—in this formulation—her readers to transcend the limits of debased materiality and find comfort in the fictional presentation of moral absolutes. Conforming to Peter Brooks’ definition of melodrama as ‘the principle mode for uncovering, demonstrating and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era’, the author’s evocation of non-material forces as a means of self-transfiguration extends beyond fictional space

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<sup>140</sup> *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self*, p. 166

<sup>141</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen & Co., 1983), p. 104

<sup>142</sup> Marie Corelli, ‘The Vanishing Gift’, 19 November 1901 MS Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-Upon-Avon

<sup>143</sup> *The Sorrows of Satan*, p. 393 and Marie Corelli, ‘A Little Talk About Literature’

<sup>144</sup> Marie Corelli to George Bentley 4 November 1893, quoted in Federico, *Idol of Suburbia*, p. 48



to assert influence in the social world.<sup>145</sup> In *Modernism and Romance*, Scott-James wrote scathingly of Corelli as ‘the oracle and high priestess’ of ‘what the commonplace man is already saying’, yet this is not far from how she herself theorised the purpose of art and the role of the artist in society.<sup>146</sup> As an article remarked on her death in 1924, she considered herself: ‘a social critic, a woman with a mission, a prophetess. She spoke to the suburbs and the country houses as a kind of popular equivalent of Carlyle or Mr Bernard Shaw, a rigid moralist denouncing the shams and follies of Society’.<sup>147</sup> Deeply troubled by the moral decay and materialist pessimism coming to define the social conditions of modern Britain, Corelli invests her popular romances with the power to uplift and restore the depleted spiritual resources of her readers. Aligning her work with the ‘great men of time’, notably William Shakespeare whom she praises for having wrote solely ‘to lift the public mind to higher and more imaginative places of thought than the daily round of toil and care’, she moves the role of popular author closer to that of the religious visionary.<sup>148</sup>

Recognising the didactic objective of these popular novels as to ‘soothe and uplift her audience’, Anne Stiles proposes that: ‘Corelli arguably took the romance more seriously than Stevenson, Andrew Lang, and others who construed the primary function of the genre as escapism and wish-fulfilment’.<sup>149</sup> It is certainly the case, as we have already seen, that Corelli sought to distance her metaphysical and morally improving take on the romance mode from the ‘ghastly’ anthropological fantasies pursued by the derisible ‘Great Fraternity’. However, to dismiss some romancers on the basis of ‘escapism’ is to disavow the moral and psychological purpose ascribed to the genre, a project in which Corelli’s religious allegories also participated. In his introduction to the 1888 Edition of *Waverley*, Lang delineated the social function of story telling along similar lines to those pursued by Corelli: avowing that Walter Scott’s novel ‘ends like a fairy-tale’ in contradiction of ‘real life’, which ‘ever ends like a Northern saga’, he proposes that ‘among the good things that make life bearable,

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<sup>145</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and The Mode of Excess* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 34

<sup>146</sup> Scott-James, *Modernism and Romance*, p. 139

<sup>147</sup> *Review of Reviews* (May 1924)

<sup>148</sup> ‘A Little Talk about Literature’. See Christine Gannon, ‘Marie Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan*: Literary Professionalism and the Female Author as Priest’, *English Literature in Transition* 56.3 (2013) 374-395, for a further analysis of this role and its significance to the late-Victorian literary marketplace

<sup>149</sup> Anne Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 160

such fairy-tales are not the least precious, and not the least enduring'.<sup>150</sup> Further, though Corelli operated largely outside of the social and professional networks that composed the romance revival he spearheaded, the two found common ground in their valorisation of the 'common reader' over the 'majority of Culture's modern disciples', who are without 'natural taste or impulse' and are 'guided only by a feverish desire to admire the newest thing, to follow the latest artistic fashion'.<sup>151</sup>

The enduring popularity of the late-Victorian period as a site for critical intervention can be partly attributed to the rapidly changing shape of literary culture in that period, as instituted by the broadening of the reading public facilitated by the 1870 Forster Education Act, the decline of circulating libraries and the creation of an affordable literary marketplace.<sup>152</sup> This expanded and democratised literary culture provoked considerable anxiety among the *fin de siècle's* elite arbiters who believed themselves to be witnessing the irreversible commodification and monetisation of the book. Underwriting this fear for the artistry of fiction was the assumption that this new 'regiment' of readers could possess only a rudimentary understanding literature, and that writers would soon be forced to cater to these undeveloped tastes. As Christine Ferguson had noted, the analytic powers of these new readers were frequently 'aligned with that of primitive humans', while theories of 'mass literacy drew on theories of human development, allying the formal aspects of certain types of literary production to different stages of mental development'.<sup>153</sup> In turn, the romance novel, with its emphasis on incident and intrigue over the subtleties of character development, was viewed as catering to and encouraging the 'commonplace sentimentalities and prejudices' of this evolutionary stalled mass of readers.<sup>154</sup>

Bearing in mind the 'primitive racial inheritance' of the imagined Scottish reader, it is notable that in their defence of the romance both Corelli and Lang endorsed this reading of a primal popular culture, while refuting absolutely its identification of value with the only the modern or the rational. Where 'Literature

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<sup>150</sup> Andrew Lang introduction to Walter Scott, *Waverley or 'tis Sixty Years Since* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. cii. Lang also published *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* in 1906 and *Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy* (1910)

<sup>151</sup> Andrew Lang, 'The Art of Mark Twain', *Illustrated London News* 14 February 1891

<sup>152</sup> Thinking here of studies like Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) and Norman Feltes, *Literary Capital and the Late Victorian Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993)

<sup>153</sup> Christine Ferguson, *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: The Brutal Tongue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 51

<sup>154</sup> Quoted in William Stuart Scott, *Marie Corelli: The Story of a Friendship* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p. 30

(with a capital L)' can only ever reflect the surface of human experience, its present manners and customs, for its supporters the romance accessed a deeper reality and in turn, a more essential facet of the self.<sup>155</sup> Closely articulated with Lang's impatience with 'elite' forms of culture, modern romance is imagined to enjoy a lineage stretching back through oral folk cultures and as thus appealing to a comparable set of elemental drives and desires. Finding in local customs and folktales similarities and parallels that transcended geographical, temporal and cultural distances, Lang's exploration of myth and archetype led him to the masculine romance. Though Corelli avoided the explicitly anthropological language employed by Lang, there is little trace of his ancestral 'barbarian' in her religious fables, she similarly imbued certain narrative forms with prelapsarian or pre-modern resonances. In an essay on the 'Power of the Pen' for instance, she wondered if the 'present system of education' might be impairing the nation's ability to appreciate 'fairy tales' and the 'garden of delights' these afford to the reader.<sup>156</sup> The anxiety voiced here, that some ancient facet of the imagination might be lost with the greater formalisation of learning, encodes an idealised vision of the social, in which literature marks a point of integration between the aesthetic and the natural, oral and written, mundane and divine. Corelli's novels, with their highly allegorised characters, extremes of good and evil, metaphysically insured systems of retribution and clear moral imperatives, present modern fairytales or myths capable of bringing about this desired re-integration.

As we have already seen, Lang's preference for romance, made clear in his literary *causeries* and boisterously elucidated in the 'Art of Fiction' debate, rested largely upon an anthropological reading of the imagination, which privileged its irrational elements and resisted the incursion of scientific method into its territories. Formed in reaction to an essay by William Dean Howells—which praised Henry James' character studies for refusing to cater to the 'childish' demand for incident and recognising instead that 'in one manner or other the stories were all told long ago'—this theorisation of the romance communicates a very real concern with the psychological and cultural value of storytelling.<sup>157</sup> Intersecting at key points with a broader democratic agenda, in his support of plot-driven adventure fictions over the psychological complexities of the realist novel Lang also valorised the perceived

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<sup>155</sup> Andrew Lang, 'At the Sign of a Ship', *Longman's Magazine* (October, 1887), 659

<sup>156</sup> Marie Corelli, 'The Power of the Pen', *Free Opinions, Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Modern Social Life and Conduct* (London: Archibald Constable, 1905), pp. 300-1

<sup>157</sup> William Dean Howells, 'Henry James Jr.', *Century Magazine* (1882) 25-29

wholeness of traditional or oral cultures. So that recalling an encounter with a Highland farmer possessed of the power second sight, in his column for *Longman's Magazine*, he was prompted to praise his 'old poetical' gift for storytelling and assert that 'no English beater [...] could have talked as that old gillie talked', as despite being 'unschooled', 'history was tradition to him, a living oral legend'.<sup>158</sup> Along similar lines, in *Adventures Among Books* he proposed that, 'The natural people, the folk, has supplied to us, in its *unconscious* way, with the stuff of all our poetry'.<sup>159</sup> As Margaret Beetham and Julia Reid have pointed out, there at times existed a patronising tone in Lang's habitual eulogies to the 'folk' and more broadly in the romanticisation of oral culture from a figure central to the world of literature and publishing. As Beetham has it, his populist views were 'articulated with all the resources of the scholar whose education had been anything but popular'.<sup>160</sup> Though this criticism is certainly valid, it remains possible to pursue a reading of his use of the term 'unconscious', that connects the 'folk' to not only an 'unknowing' or 'unaware' form of engagement with the world, but also to a particular model of creative inspiration and production. Sketched out in his literary criticism and pertinently, in his unwavering praise of the romance genre, was an idealised form of creative experience that accessed both older models of seership such as those embodied by the second-sighted 'gillie' and newly elaborated psychical tropes. Picking up upon some of the connections already suggested between these themes, the final section of this chapter is concerned with the ways in which both Corelli and Lang accessed the 'subliminal' as a site of primitive, unconscious and transcendental inspiration.

### 4.3 THE MYTHOPOETIC IMAGINATION

In Marie Corelli's fable of modern moral decay, *The Sorrows of Satan*, her corrupt publisher 'David McWhing' praises the work of any writer who is male, fashionable and willing to pay, but subjects the work of the ethereal female novelist Mavis Clare

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<sup>158</sup> Andrew Lang, 'At the Sign of a Ship', *Longman's Magazine* (Nov. 1886), 105-112 (107-8)

<sup>159</sup> Andrew Lang, *Adventures Among Books* (London: Longmans, 1903) p. 37 (my italics)

<sup>160</sup> Margaret Beetham, 'The Agony Aunt, the Romancing Uncle and the Family of Empire: Defining the Sixpenny Reading Public in the 1890s' in *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, ed. Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David Finkelstein (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) p. 263 and Julia Reid, 'King Romance' in *Longman's Magazine: Andrew Lang and Literary Populism*, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 44.4 (Winter, 2011) 354-376

to scathing personal attacks in ‘all the papers he can command’.<sup>161</sup> Described as ‘a fair-haired girl in a white gown’, a ‘slight feminine creature’, a ‘butterfly thing’, she is presented to the reader as a modest, self-effacing writer of genius, loathed by critics but serving a morally edifying role for her beloved and vast public.<sup>162</sup> Sequestered deep in the English countryside at an ascetic remove from the materialism of the literary marketplace, Clare’s ‘unaffected and simple’ goodness imbues her novels with spiritually redemptive potentials.<sup>163</sup> As critics then and now have noted, Mavis Clare bears a certain likeness to her creator, or as the journalist William T. Stead put it bluntly in 1895: ‘Marie Corelli’s ideal of what she would like to be, but isn’t; what in her more exalted moments she imagines herself to be’.<sup>164</sup> Respecting the author’s refutation of this accusation, in a letter to George Bentley she denied that she would ever be ‘so conceited as to draw my own picture in that ideal conception’, the model of authorship Clare represents does resemble that which Corelli also attempted to embody.<sup>165</sup> This re-staging, what Jill Galvan has usefully described as ‘a means of creative self-disguise—a means of putting forward, in the character of her narrator, the most pleasing image of herself as a female artist’, represents only one aspect of the writer’s complex autohagiography.<sup>166</sup> Introducing herself to the editor of *Blackwood’s Magazine* as a ‘Venetian, and the direct descendent (through a long line of ancestry) of the great Michael Angelo Corelli, the famous composer and also on the other side of the family from one on the Doges of Venice’, the author played down her relatively humble upbringing to cultivate a glamorous and exotic public persona.<sup>167</sup> While recent scholarship, notably Annette Federico’s *Idol of Suburbia* (2000), has attended to the relationship between authorial fashioning and an emergent celebrity culture, attention is paid here to the particular model of creative genius that emerges from this self-theatricalisation.

Pursued through Corelli’s popular fictions was an extensive theorisation of artistic inspiration that accessed categories of the visionary, the unconscious and the spiritual. Having peopled her novels with musicians, novelists and poets, she engaged in a career-long exploration of the mystery of creative insight and the mechanics of

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<sup>161</sup> *Sorrows of Satan*, p. 221

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* p. 218

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* p. 183

<sup>164</sup> W.T. Stead, ‘The Book of the Month: ‘The Sorrows of Satan’—and of Marie Corelli’, *Review of Reviews*, 12 (October 1895), 453

<sup>165</sup> Quoted in Masters, *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter*, p. 143

<sup>166</sup> Galvan, 95

<sup>167</sup> Quoted in Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations* p. 771

literary production. This narrative strategy enabled the author, in the first instance, to re-iterate her thinking on the self-effacing nature and prophetic function of literature in modern society. In *Ardath*, for example, the creatively blocked poet Theos opines, ‘When pictures are painted and books written for money only [...] when all the finer sentiments and nobler instincts of men are made subject to Mammon worship, is any one so mad and blind to think that good can come of it?’; and in *A Romance of Two Worlds* a writer of true genius is identified as one ‘whose work the world repays with ridicule and contempt. There is no fate more admirable’.<sup>168</sup> As Christiane Gannon has recently attended to, ‘Corelli’s novels spiritualize the profession of artist, and these portraits of “holy” artistic professionals that readers can revere are meant to counter the image of the artist produced by Decadence or aestheticism’.<sup>169</sup> Beyond serving simply to bolster or justify her position as a popular romancer, the re-staging of the creative process itself saw Corelli pursue a profound engagement with nineteenth-century debates concerning the physiological and psychological meaning of ‘genius’. The disaffected poet Theos voices the pathological reading pursued by some late-Victorian thinkers when he parrots the opinion of a ‘scientific friend’ who believes genius to be ‘nothing to boast of since it is only a morbid and unhealthy condition of the intellectual faculties’ and that ‘all the widely renowned ‘great ones’ of the earth should be classified as so many brains more or less affected by abnormal molecular formation, which strictly speaking amounted to brain-deformity’.<sup>170</sup> The redemptive narrative of *Ardath*, in which the protagonist is converted from a ‘purely scientific’ condemnation of creativity to a realisation of its deeply spiritual purpose, came to compose a recurrent motif of the Corellian romance.

Her first novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, sees the author pursue a reading of creativity that hybridises the Romantic ideal of the artist as a conduit for mystical truths, with the female channeling associated with the practices of modern spiritualism. The narrator, a creatively blocked and neurasthenic pianist, is taught to channel the music of angels and ends the text enjoying sellout performances and universal adoration. On lamenting that she can no longer claim the music she makes as truly her own, the narrator is chastised by her Chaldean adept Heliobas, who counters that rather ‘it is a bad sign of poet, painter, or musician, who is arrogant

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<sup>168</sup> *Ardath* p. 529 and *A Romance of Two Worlds*. p. 40

<sup>169</sup> Christiane Gannon, ‘Marie Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan*: Literary Professionalism and the Female Author as Priest’, *English Literature in Transition* 56.3 (2013), 374-395 (379)

<sup>170</sup> *Ardath*, p. 22

enough to call his work his own [...] it is planned by a higher intelligence than his, only he happens to be the hired labourer chosen to carry out the conception'.<sup>171</sup> In this formulation creative production is entirely dependant on exterior influence, with the artist composing only a peculiarly sensitive channel through which divine compositions flow. As was most fully realised in *The Soul of Lilith*, in which the extreme passivity of the comatose Lilith serves sharp rebuke to the notion that women can derive authority from the role of spiritual vessel, Corelli ultimately problematised the spiritual self-erasure valorised in *A Romance of Two Worlds*. Taking up the problems of inspiration and authenticity once more in *Ardath*, she proposes a radical solution. After composing a poem via automatic writing Theos wonders, 'Whether this busy working of the brain called "Imagination" may not perhaps be a special phase or supreme effort of *Memory*, and that therefore we do not imagine so much as we *remember* [...] if we have ever lived before, our present recollection may, in certain exalted states of the mind, serve to bring back the shadow-pictures of things long gone by'.<sup>172</sup> Borrowing from notions of collective memory and Hindu conceptions of reincarnation, memories from different lives and incarnations retained within the same soul, but only accessible at certain points, are posited here as a source of artistic inspiration. Thus, as Alisha Siebers has suggested, the poet 'enjoys the best of both worlds for his inspiration comes from an external source, but it is a former version of himself. He is thus simultaneously original and transcendent'.<sup>173</sup> Also implicated in this reformulation of the creative process is an evolving dynamic between conscious and unconscious states of mind, which permitted the author to bring the theoretical elaboration of psychical concepts to bear upon an older model of mystically inspired genius.

Usefully described by Sarah Wilburn as belonging to a sub-genre of Victorian fiction, the '*trance novel*', which typically engage with questions of mediumship, mesmerism or occultism and 'feature interiorized characters who have beyond-physical vision' who 'contain and perform more than a single subjectivity', Corelli's fictions routinely associated artistic production with the cultivation of altered states of consciousness.<sup>174</sup> Here the popular romancer shared significant common ground with

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<sup>171</sup> *A Romance of Two Worlds*, p. 234

<sup>172</sup> Marie Corelli, *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* (London: Bentley, 1889), p. 277 (original italics)

<sup>173</sup> Alisha Siebers, 'The Genius in *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self*', *Women's Writing* 13:2 (2006) 246-266 (250)

<sup>174</sup> Sarah Wilburn, *Possessed Victorians*, p. 115 and 135

the work of the SPR and in particular, that of its chief theorist Frederic Myers. A poet and classical scholar first, Myers was eulogised on his death by William James as essentially a ‘Romantic thinker’, for whom the ‘Subliminal Self’ constituted an important bridge between the psychological and the literary.<sup>175</sup> Outside of his work as a psychical researcher, Myers published a long poem *St. Paul* (1867), a collection *The Renewal of Youth and Other Poems* (1887), a monograph on William Wordsworth (1881), a two-volume work of literary criticism *Essays, Classical and Modern* (1883) and a series of philosophical essays, *Science and a Future Life* (1893).<sup>176</sup> In essay titled ‘Tennyson as Prophet’, the role of the true artist or ‘sage’ is described in terms that echo contemporary justifications of the romance genre: ‘Besides the *savant*, occupied in discovering objective truth—besides the artist occupied in representing and idealising that truth—we need some voice to speak to us of those greatest, those undiscoverable things which can never be wholly ignored or forgotten’.<sup>177</sup> Recalling Lang’s description, in *The Making of Religion* (1898), of the ‘X region of our nature’ as the site of all ‘miracles, prophecy and vision’, it is significant that for Myers the ‘prophetic’ artist is one who speaks both to and from this ‘margin undiscovered’.<sup>178</sup> In his study of Wordsworth Myers described the poet as experiencing, by means of the ‘auxiliary light’ of his imagination, flashes of inspiration and moments of insight into a usually occluded spiritual world and elsewhere praised the work of William Blake as revealing ‘the subliminal self flashing for moments into unity, then smouldering again in a lurid and scattering glow’.<sup>179</sup> It was in trance or fugue states that for Myers, as for Corelli, it became possible to observe and understand the imagination’s mysterious operations.

In the posthumously published *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) Myers’s chapter on ‘Genius’ is set apart from the rest of the text in terms of both its content and structure: markedly more personal in tone and lacking an appendix, it is drawn primarily from his personal experience and the recorded experiences of his fellow poets. Recalling Gillian Beer’s description of the romance as that which strives to make ‘apparent the dreams of the world’, it is significant the new

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<sup>175</sup> *PSPR* 18 (1903-1904), 22

<sup>176</sup> See Helen Groth, ‘Subliminal Histories: Psychological Experimentation in Poetry and Poetics of Frederic W.H. Myers’, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 12 (2011) <http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/index.php/19/article/view/594/683> [accessed 25 September 2013]

<sup>177</sup> Frederic Myers, *Science and a Future Life: With Other Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1893), p. 129

<sup>178</sup> *The Making of Religion*, p. 30

<sup>179</sup> Myers, *Wordsworth* (London: Macmillan, 1881), p. 31 and *Human Personality*, p. 65



science of mind pursued by this study correlated inspiration with dream-like conditions.<sup>180</sup> Having criticised ‘elder psychologists’ for choosing to ignore evidence garnered in ‘infancy, idiocy, sleep, insanity, decay’, Myers goes on to assert that: ‘I accord no primacy to my ordinary waking self, except that among my potential selves this one has shown itself fittest to meet the needs of a common life’ and claims that in fact, ‘the dream world gives a truer representation than the waking world of the real fractionation or multiplicity existing beneath that delusive simplicity which the glare of consciousness imposes on the mental field of view’.<sup>181</sup> Akin to Corelli’s oft-repeated dictate, that ‘Imagination is Experience’, this proposed psychical continuum recognised the appearance of conscious coherence as an illusion, composing only an everyday disguise for the depths of the self.<sup>182</sup>

Echoing the imagery employed in his literary criticism Myers described ‘flashes’ of genius as ‘fugitive bright lines referable to our subliminal strata’ and proposed creativity as one of the forces capable of transcending the boundary between the subliminal and supraliminal.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, in what amounted to refutation of the normative assessments of abnormal psychology, the trance state was characterised as the primary location in which such imaginative powers may be best accessed.<sup>184</sup> He wrote that, the ‘subliminal consciousness and subliminal memory may embrace a far wider range both of physiological and of psychical activity than is open to our supraliminal consciousness, to our supraliminal memory. The spectrum of consciousness, if I may so call it, is the subliminal self infinitely extended at both ends’.<sup>185</sup> In this taxonomy, spiritualist phenomena like automatic writing, clairvoyance and crystal vision were transformed into methods by which information from the subliminal self could be brought briefly to the supraliminal level: ‘They present themselves to us as messages communicated from one stratum to another stratum of the same personality’.<sup>186</sup> Vastly expanding what could be considered the ‘normal’ functions of the mind, his assertion that the ‘Inspiration of Genius’ is in fact a

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<sup>180</sup> Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1884), p. 42 and Beer, *The Romance*, p. 54

<sup>181</sup> Myers, *Human Personality*, p. 58-9

<sup>182</sup> Corelli, ‘A Little Talk About Literature’

<sup>183</sup> Myers, ‘The Subliminal Consciousness’, *PSPR* 8 (1892), 334

<sup>184</sup> Thinking here of work like Henry Maudsley’s account of hysteria in *Body and Will: An Inquiry into their Connection and Mutual Influences, Specifically in Reference to Mental Disorders* (New York, 1871)

<sup>185</sup> Myers, ‘The Subliminal Consciousness’, *PSPR* 7 (1891-2), p. 306

<sup>186</sup> Myers, ‘The Subliminal Consciousness’, *PSPR* 7 (1891-2), p. 306

‘subliminal up-rush’ of ideas shaped in the ‘profounder rejoins of his being’, re-figured the trance state as a profoundly creative mode.<sup>187</sup>

In his study of the medium Helene Smith, *From India to the Planet Mars* (1900), the Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy acknowledged his debt to Myers by proposing that ‘the difference between mediums and ordinary people, is that with the latter there is practically a very marked trench between dream and waking. With the mediums on the contrary [...] there is no stable barrier between sleep and waking’.<sup>188</sup> It is the identification and valorisation of this uncertain boundary between fantasy and reality as the site of creativity that the late-Victorian romance spoke most directly to the work of the SPR. At times this interconnection found focus in the work of an individual writer like Robert Louis Stevenson, whose *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) was praised by Lang as evidence of the ‘involuntary elements of imaginative creation’ and constituted for Myers a clear case of inspired dreaming, a ‘subliminal uprush’ or a ‘nocturnal prolongation of the divural operation of genius’.<sup>189</sup> Elsewhere the ‘subliminal’ provided a new terminology through which to describe and conceptualise the creative process. As when Corelli proposed that what is called ‘automatic writing is no more than the natural result of the writers thought. The active impetus comes from no external ‘spirit’, but from the cell-movement in the brain’; inspiration is a form of internalised spirituality or, as Myers put it, ‘it is clear that much of what is called inspiration is a matter of memory’.<sup>190</sup> Considered at the level of the individual this privileging of information gathered from the subliminal works to validate the experiences of clairvoyants, mediums and religious ecstasies, but understood as psychological law it takes on a wider significance. As Henri F. Ellenberger has suggested, one of the most disappointingly underdeveloped elements of the Myersian schema is the promising ‘mythopoetic’ function or ‘the unconscious tendency to weave fantasies’.<sup>191</sup> Identified as a ‘superior function’ of the subliminal self—as opposed to ‘inferior functions’ revealed in dissociative states—Myers actively

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Theodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars: An Early Casebook of Psychic Research* (California: University Presses of California, Princeton and Columbia, 1995), p. 67. In his introduction to the case Flournoy claims that he owes his work to ‘above all the *subliminal consciousness* of M Myers’ whose theory ‘so much surpasses the level of ordinary scientific conceptions by flying high and at a pace which at times reaches the mysticism of true metaphysics’ (7)

<sup>189</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘At the Sign of the Ship’, *Longman’s Magazine* (February 1888), 458 and Frederic Myers, ‘Hysteria and Genius’, *JSPR* 8 (1897), 8

<sup>190</sup> Corelli, ‘Deceiving the Very the Elect: A Comment on Spiritualism’

<sup>191</sup> Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana Press, 1970)

promoted the urge to produce unrealities as one of the mind's higher capacities. In line with the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's argument in favour of an 'irreality function', which finds its natural expression in daydreaming and 'which keeps the human psyche on the fringe of all the brutality of a hostile and foreign nonself', the psychical researcher conceived of the mythopoetic function as a bolster against life's harsh realities.<sup>192</sup> Importantly, this term transacted meaning between the myth-making capacities of the unconscious and the types of work fantasy might perform in human culture.

In *Primitive Culture* Edward B. Tylor described myth as the 'process of animating and personifying nature' with the 'formation of legend by exaggeration and perversion of fact', and the 'conversion of speculative theories and still less substantial fictions into pretended historical events'.<sup>193</sup> While Tylor associated myth with a kind of primitive reasoning to be surpassed by more advanced discursive modes, conjectural history or evolutionary theory say, for Lang and Myers 'the mythopoetic faculty' was one 'common to all stages of culture'.<sup>194</sup> Seeking out folkloric parallels and the 'mythical tendencies in ghost stories', the psycho-folklorist hypothesised that 'there are necessary forms of the imagination which in widely separated peoples must produce identical results'. Bringing evidence from 'primitive' peoples and those residing on the imperial margin to bear upon the experiences of his readers, this comparative method collapsed temporal and geographical boundaries to posit the existence 'a common species of hallucination' found in 'all lands and all ages'.<sup>195</sup> Notable here is the transformation of myth making from a hermeneutical activity associated with the exterior conditions of a particular stage in the development of human culture, to an innate and universal facet of the unconscious. Although he has frequently been characterised as an unthinking defender of 'second-rate romances', during the 'Art of Fiction' debate Lang actually mounted a fairly balanced argument that sought to acknowledge the artistic skill of the realist novel and its value to the literary canon.<sup>196</sup> Romance commanded the critic's attention not

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<sup>192</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language and the Cosmos*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon, 1971), p. 13

<sup>193</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 p. 375

<sup>194</sup> Andrew Lang, 'The Comparative Study of Ghost Stories', *Nineteenth Century* 17 (1885), 623-32 (624)

<sup>195</sup> *Cock Lane and Commonsense*, p. 34. See also his discussion of the 'uniformity of belief [in phantasms and apparitions] in such widely-separated peoples and ages' in 'At the Sign of a Ship', *Longman's Magazine* (January 1887), 330

<sup>196</sup> Harold Orel, *Victorian Literary Critics: George Henry Lewes, Walter Bagebot, Richard Holt Hutton, Leslie Stephen, Andrew Lang, George Saintsbury and Edmund Gosse* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 137

because he loathed realism, but because in its most fantastic and unrestrained moments, it spoke directly to this universal myth-making faculty.

Moreover, as is made clear by his praise of Walter Scott having ‘reeled’ off his novels in ‘a white heat’, Lang also placed emphasis on certain forms of creative production as particularly conducive to the pursuit of primitive or universal ‘truths’.<sup>197</sup> In his editor’s introduction to *Waverley*, for instance, he commented approvingly that, about ‘Shakespeare it was said that he never ‘blotted a line’. The observation is almost literally true about Sir Walter. The pages of his manuscript novels show scarcely a retouch or an erasure’. Though this ‘indifference is not to be praised’, it does constitute ‘proof of his greatness’ as the ‘heart which beats in his works, the knowledge of human nature, the dramatic vigour of his character, the nobility of his whole being win the day against the looseness of his manner’.<sup>198</sup> Along similar lines, Nickianne Moody has noted that ‘early success and exclusion from literary social circles meant that Corelli could avoid being edited [...] her novels are, consequently, unwieldy and lack restraint’.<sup>199</sup> This was reflected in not only the stylistic excess and repetitions that characterised the Corellian romance, but also in states of rapture and ekstasis that typically accompany scenes of creative production within those fictional spaces. Dismissing the careful editing of ‘Flaubert or Mr. Ruskin’ for the ‘white heat’ the romancer, Lang shared common ground with Corelli in favouring methods of authorship which appeared to eschew technique or skilfulness, in order to access information from the deeper rejoins of the self. Yet recalling the description of the ‘folk’ who have supplied in a ‘*unconscious* way’ the stuff of all our poetry’, it is necessary to re-iterate the distinction being made, by both Lang and Corelli, between unthinking acts and valuable creative skills accessed on the borders of consciousness.<sup>200</sup> Recounting his own visionary experience, for example, Lang avowed that ‘I who can scarcely form the faintest mental picture, when awake, can see with eyes shut, on the border of sleep, very vivid presentations of objects’.<sup>201</sup> Considered in this light second sight occupies a uniquely dual position: it composed a myth and mythopoetic technique, a folkloric tradition that inspires the romancer and psychical state akin to the creative process itself.

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<sup>197</sup> ‘Realism and Romance’, 689

<sup>198</sup> Andrew Lang introduction to Walter Scott, *Waverley or ‘tis Sixty Years Since* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. xxiii

<sup>199</sup> Moody, ‘Moral Uncertainty and the Afterlife’, 202

<sup>200</sup> Lang, *Adventures Among Books*, p. 37 (my italics)

<sup>201</sup> Lang, ‘Human Personality After Death’, *Monthly Review* (March 1903) 94-109 (96)

## CONCLUSION

In *Historical Mysteries* (1904), Andrew Lang devoted a chapter to ‘The Case of Allan Breck’, a Jacobite deserter who was implicated in the murder of Colin Roy Campbell in 1752 and tried in absentia after he evaded capture. The mystery of his disappearance and the doubts over the nature of his involvement in the killing of the ‘Red Fox’ remained unresolved by the publication of this text. In his treatment of the story Lang invested it with the status of a modern myth—replayed in Sir Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* (1817) which begins with a re-telling of the Appin murder and in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* (1886) which features Allan Breck Stuart as a character—but also re-told and re-shaped through a still thriving oral culture. Though the ‘affair is a hundred and fifty years old’, in ‘Appin and Glencoe’ Lang assured his reader, ‘people remember these things well’. Despite the incursions of the ‘railway’, ‘daily steamers bringing the newspapers’ and ‘English, French and American’ tourists, he continues, the ‘Gaelic is still spoken, second sight is nearly as common as short sight, you may really hear the fairy music if you bend your ear, on a still day, to the grass of the fairy knowe’.<sup>202</sup> Here second sight served as not only a marker of a traditional society resilient to the disenchanting influence of modern civilisation, but also as a form of perception ‘nearly as common as short sight’ which gives over privileged insight into the history of a place and its people, or ‘the secret that the Celt’s would not communicate to Mr. R.L. Stevenson, when he was writing *Kidnapped*’.<sup>203</sup>

Captured in this snapshot of a wild Highland region resilient against the ever-imposing modern world, protective of its old ways and of its secrets, is the framing that informed Lang’s extensive and varied treatment of second sight. Though he was at times willing to concede ‘telepathy’ or ‘phantasms’ some ground in describing the phenomenon, it always contradicts or exceeds these explanatory frames. Rather than simply an expression of his tendency towards disciplinary *dilettantism*, Lang’s reluctance to fully settle the question of second sight revealed its expansive signifying powers. The prophetic narratives of the Highlander could not be fully assimilated by the scientific paradigms posited by the SPR because these remained wedded, for this ‘Son of the Borders’, to imagination and romance. In an essay on ‘The Supernatural

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<sup>202</sup> Lang, *Historical Mysteries* (1904), (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1905), pp. 75-98

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

in Fiction' Lang wrote, 'Perhaps it may die out in a positive age—this power of learning to shudder. To us it descends from very long ago, from the far-off forefathers who dreaded the dark, and who, half starved and all untaught, saw spirits everywhere, and scarce discerned waking experience from dreaming'. Second sight then preserved a connection to these primitive 'forefathers' and defends against the dreariness of a 'positive age'.<sup>204</sup> While Marie Corelli is less concerned with geographically embodied romance, preferring spiritual other worlds and exotic realms to the wilds of Scotland, she was similarly invested in the psychologically essential nature of the romance and the curative qualities of the fantastic. Adopting the role of the plebeian experimenter, Corelli's great skill lay in her manipulation of the scientific to the needs of the romance. In spite of her avowed antipathy for 'Mr. Andrew Lang' sat 'on his little bibliographic dust-heap', the two shared significant common ground in their explorations of the popular, the psychical and the visionary.

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<sup>204</sup> Lang, 'The Supernatural in Fiction' in *Adventures Among Books*, pp. 271-280 (279)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESEARCH IN THE FIELD: ADA GOODRICH FREER AND FIONA MACLEOD, 1890-1910

In September of 1896 the *Glasgow Evening News* ran an article entitled ‘Ghost Hunting in the Highlands’, which reported with some bemusement that a ‘Miss Goodrich-Freer of the Psychical Research Society was last week seen tiptoeing round the Hebrides in a careful and gallant attempt to surprise real Highland ghosts at work; capture a possessor of second sight, or collect any other evidence on the occult phenomena of the Outer Isles’.<sup>1</sup> Four years previous to this, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) had instituted the tentative beginnings of a unique scientific investigation. Guided by Frederic W.H. Myers, the Society secured the financial backing of the influential Scottish nationalist, Lord Bute who made an initial donation of £150 on the condition that ‘an exhaustive inquiry into Second Sight in the Highlands might be instituted’.<sup>2</sup> Before dispatching a researcher to go ‘tiptoeing round’, a designated sub-committee had drafted a schedule of questions to be dispatched to sympathetic parties in request of information pertaining to the phenomenon. However, though this epistolary approach had proved hugely successful elsewhere—pertinently in the ongoing ‘Census of Hallucinations’ to which the second-sight inquiry was intended to eventually contribute—it produced almost no serviceable data in this particular context: of nearly 2000 questionnaires sent out only sixty four were returned with useable information.<sup>3</sup> Reflecting on these disappointing results in a early report given to the Society, the researcher charged with heading the investigation, Ada Goodrich-Freer, proposed that the ‘circulars had been neglected, not from indifference’, but because many potential respondents felt that ‘a tradition reverently received from their ancestors, was one too great for their

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Ghost Hunting in the Highlands’, *Glasgow Evening News* 5 September 1896

<sup>2</sup> ‘Annual Business Meeting’, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 6 (February 1893) 19

<sup>3</sup> The ‘Census of Hallucinations’ was a large-scale survey intended to bolster the conclusions drawn by Edmund Gurney, Frank Podmore and Frederic Myers in *Phantasms of the Living* (1886). Begun in 1889, it aimed to provide statistical proofs of the hallucinatory model espoused by this earlier study. Appeals for input were placed in periodicals like *Nineteenth Century*, *New Review* and *The Review of Reviews*. See Shane McCristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 192-202

powers of handling, too sacred for discussion with strangers'.<sup>4</sup> It was with the intention of establishing proximity with these reticent Highlanders and their treasured beliefs that from early 1894 Goodrich-Freer, in partnership with two local folklorists Father Allan Macdonald and Reverend Peter Dewar, toured through remote fishing villages and rural crofting communities in search of the elusive second sight.<sup>5</sup>

Despite a promising start, by the close of 1896 the investigation had been abandoned and its research team disbanded, with no coherent account of their findings ever published. In terms of the trajectory sketched out by this thesis, this failed investigation marks a significant point of disjuncture. Where previous chapters have charted second sight's discursive migration through nineteenth-century cultural sites, propelled largely by the recirculation of a corpus of pre-Victorian texts and guided by the demands of observational regimes inculcated in the metropolis, the instituting of a formal inquiry undertaken in the field presents an approach more akin to the activities of eighteenth-century antiquarians and travel writers. Though the epistemological desires of the SPR differed from those guiding earlier studies, it is of some significance that the organisation cultivated a very similar methodology in relation to second sight, which involved the direct observation of scientific subjects and the collection of folkloric materials from local sources.

Particularly remarkable is how far removed this fieldwork was from the investigative techniques usually favored by the Society. Recalling Andrew Lang's complaint that 'Psychical Research' has no use for those 'who cannot be cross-examined at 20 Hanover Square', its foray through the Highlands must be read as a somewhat uncharacteristic episode in its early history.<sup>6</sup> This marginality has been replicated in modern scholarship, which has largely sidelined or ignored this atypical survey. An exception to this is John L. Campbell and Trevor T. Hall's *Strange Things: The Story of Fr. Allan McDonald, Ada Goodrich Freer and the Society for Psychical Research* (1968), which ably reconstructs the investigation using newspaper coverage, Lord

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<sup>4</sup> *JSPR* 7 (January 1895), 3

<sup>5</sup> Fr. Allan McDonald has been the subject of a recent biography: Robert Hutchinson, *Father Allan: The Life and Legacy of a Hebridean Priest* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Press, 2010)

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Comparative Psychical Research', *Contemporary Review* (September 1893) and 'Last Words on Totemism, Marriage and Religion', *Folklore* 23.3 (September 1912), 377



Bute's letters, published and archival SPR materials.<sup>7</sup> Although the study is composed of two separate texts, these are linked by a shared desire to re-write a perceived historical injustice, which has seen Goodrich-Freer claim credit for the work of the Gaelic folklorist, Fr. Allan Macdonald. Specifically, Campbell charges the researcher with having used the contents of a notebook titled 'Strange Things' in her reports to the SPR without sufficient public acknowledgement of the original source material. Raised by this text are important issues concerning ownership and authenticity, and what violence might be enacted by acts of linguistic and cultural appropriation.

Yet in exploring these themes, these writers are guilty of not only ignoring the various points at which Goodrich-Freer did properly credit her sources, but also of sensationalising their subject's personal life.<sup>8</sup> Characterised as a manipulative liar who faked her way into a position of relative power aided by only by the 'fact' that the men around her found her sexually attractive, her prominent position within the SPR is accounted for by her 'personal attractions which seem to have been almost hypnotic in their effect, and which she used irresistibly and ruthlessly upon those whom she thought could be of use', and an unsubstantiated claim that she was engaged in an affair with Myers.<sup>9</sup> As Hilary Grimes has so accurately observed, the extreme hostility with which these writers approach their subject makes it appear, 'as if they want to exorcise her from both the history of the society and their own text'.<sup>10</sup> It is not the aim of this chapter to mount a defence of this historical figure, though the barely-disguised misogyny underpinning Hall's thesis certainly invites it. Instead the following pages will propose an alternative approach to this history: one that treats the ultimate failure of the investigation and the authorial self-fashioning of its

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<sup>7</sup> Lord Bute (1847-1900) John Crichton-Stuart, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Bute (1847-1900), was a prominent member of the SPR and the sole funder of its expedition into the highlands. In addition to his interest in psychical research and the occult, the Marquess was also a keen architect, religious scholar and supporter of Scottish nationalism. See K. D. Reynolds, 'Stuart, John Patrick Crichton-, third marquess of Bute (1847-1900)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>8</sup> In 'Powers of Evil in the Outer Hebrides', *Folklore* 10.3 (September 1899) 258-282 Goodrich-Freer avows that 'I could never myself have accomplished such a collection, and have to acknowledge most cordially and fully the help of Rev. Allan Macdonald, Priest of Eriskay, to whose patience, erudition, and perhaps even more his friendship with these people, these records are mainly due' (256)

<sup>9</sup> Hall claims that he 'had been told that in some circles an affair between Miss Freer and F. W. H. Myers, one of the founders of the S. P. R., had been suspected', *Strange Things*, p. 96

<sup>10</sup> Hilary Grimes, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 88

chief researcher as useful routes of enquiry, rather than subjects for posthumous condemnation.<sup>11</sup>

Originally known to the SPR as ‘Miss X’, Goodrich-Freer occupied an ambiguous position in London’s psychical community. In addition to producing scholarly research on topics like hypnotism and crystal vision for the *Proceedings for Psychical Research*, she was also a self-defined clairvoyant, sometimes spiritualist medium, automatic writer and the co-editor of William Thomas Stead’s broadly spiritualist periodical *Borderland*. This chameleon-like quality allowed her to occupy simultaneously the roles of scientific observer and supernatural subject, elite investigator and populist disseminator, skeptical scientist and open-minded mystic. Of all the half-truths and deceptions that apparently constituted ‘Miss X’, her manufacture of an ancestrally Highland identity attracts the most fevered condemnation from *Strange Things*. From the perspective of the following chapter whether or not she hailed from a Scottish family that have ‘counted seers for many generations’ is of little import.<sup>12</sup> Rather attention is paid to how this identity, fabricated or otherwise, met the conditions of the investigation itself by constructing the ideal scientific researcher, one capable of bridging the cultural divide between the remote Highlands and London.

Convinced that ‘Miss Goodrich-Freer’ will find much to capture with her ‘snap-shot camera’ and many an ‘Outer Hebridean’ willing to convey ‘a lot of mythology in one sitting’, the *Glasgow Evening News* closed its report by way of another mystically-inclined writer with an interest in ‘stories of ghosts, fairies, supernatural cantrips’.<sup>13</sup> Identified as an ‘apostle of the ‘Anglo-Celtic’ movement’, ‘Miss Fiona Macleod’ was gently mocked here for her poor appreciation of Gaelic: apparently her dreadful mispronunciation of the name of a mythical ‘water horse’ is sure to ‘bring a blush to the cheek of Celtic modesty’.<sup>14</sup> Binding these telling linguistic misapprehensions to the pretensions of the ‘lady interviewer’ who seeks to record

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<sup>11</sup>In biographical studies such as *The Spiritualists: the Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes* (1963), *The Strange Case of Edmund Gurney* (1980) and *The Enigma of Daniel Home: Medium or Fraud?* (1984), Trevor Hall established himself as a vocal critic of the SPR’s early members and the research aims of psychical research more widely. Regarding his work on second sight, G. W. Lambert’s 1969 review in the *JSPR* provides a thorough-going critique of Hall’s accusations regarding Myers and proposes that he fails ‘to sustain the wholesale aspersions on her character’ *JSPR* 45 (June, 1969), 43-55 (55)

<sup>12</sup>Miss X, ‘The Art of Crystal Gazing’, *Borderland* 1 (1894), 117-127 (127)

<sup>13</sup>*Cantrip* is a Scot’s word denoting a magical spell or supernatural incantation

<sup>14</sup>‘Fiona Macleod on W.B. Yeats’, *The Academy and Literature* 25 October 1902, 444-445 (444)

ineffable mysteries with ‘a Kodak’, the article concludes that neither have the ‘eye of faith’ or the ‘hereditary nose’ required to comprehend the ‘uncanny gifts’ they seem so keen to unearth among the population.<sup>15</sup> This connection, drawn between the Highland wanderings of the psychical researcher and a broader revival of ‘Celticism’ in British culture, is one also pursued by this chapter. Made famous by the weighty symbolism of works such as the *Mountain Lovers* (1895) and *The Divine Adventure* (1900), Macleod formed part of a new generation of self-identified ‘Celtic’ writers coming to prominence at the *fin de siècle*. In keeping with the hazy mysticism of her prose, the author was presented in the popular press as a reticent artist, removed from society and living in the remote Western Isles: as one newspaper put it, she is a ‘Celt of the Celts’, from ‘an old Highland family’ and ‘a child of nature and the open air, having no sympathy with the great cities, which she seldom visits’.<sup>16</sup> Instrumental to the rebirth of interest in Gaelic myth and folklore sustaining the late-nineteenth-century Celtic Revival, Macleod embodied a vision of spiritual womanhood aligned to the natural world and situated in active opposition to the rational imperatives of the metropole.<sup>17</sup>

As the *Glasgow Evening News* alluded there was a detectable theatricality in this authorial identity, something inauthentic and unreal in this Highland prophetess. From her first publication, *Pharsis: A Romance of the Isles* in 1894, rumours concerning the true identity of this elusive writer circulated through both public and private networks. Proposals included William Butler Yeats, the poet Nora J. Hopper and the Irish nationalist Maude Gonne, with some eventually concluding that, ‘there is no such person as Fiona Macleod at all but simply a syndicate of young Celtic authors who write under that name’.<sup>18</sup> In a letter to Gonne, dictated in January 1907, Yeats revealed that he now knew ‘a great deal more about the Fiona Macleod mystery’, having spoken with the wife of the recently deceased William Sharp: ‘she was so far as external perception could say a secondary personality induced by Sharp’, who was employed to narrate the ‘semi-allegorical description of the adventures of his own

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Ghost Hunting in the Highlands’

<sup>16</sup> ‘Fiona Macleod’, *The Academy and Literature* 15 May 1897, 525-526 (525)

<sup>17</sup> Through *Strange Things* Campbell and Hall refer to ‘Miss Freer’, while often awarding male members of the SPR their full names, and this appears to me to constitute a strategy designed to patronise their subject. Instead this chapter will cite names ‘Miss X’ or ‘Ada Goodrich-Freer’ and ‘William Sharp’ or ‘Fiona Macleod’ as they appears in the printed sources

<sup>18</sup> ‘Fiona Macleod’, 525

secondary personality and its relation with the primary self.<sup>19</sup> From 1894, it emerged, the Scottish-born Sharp had sustained two writing careers, one maintained under his own name and another under the pseudonym 'Fiona Macleod'. A published poet, author of critical studies and editor of writers like Matthew Arnold and Sir Walter Scott, Sharp was an active participant in the Celtic Revival taking place in late nineteenth-century Edinburgh and a contributor to its mouthpiece, the journal *Evergreen*. Sustained in both published works and private correspondence—with Sharp's sister providing the handwritten letters—Macleod outstripped her creator in terms of sales, celebrity and credibility.<sup>20</sup>

The limited critical response to this remarkable project of literary self-disguise has thus far made much of the transvestitism or 'trans-gendering' at play in its execution, but this chapter will pursue a different line of enquiry.<sup>21</sup> Complicating the reduction of Sharp's dual persona to a question of sexual or gender identity, is the shaping influence of late-Victorian mysticism and the characterisation of Macleod as an *anima* personality. Writing in the *Fortnightly Review*, a spiritualist commentator came close to the truth in proposing that his literary persona was the result his having being 'possessed' by the spirit of St. Bridget.<sup>22</sup> Though this explanation certainly touches upon some of the discursive strategies deployed, particularly in its evocation of the embodiment of two souls, a far more active engagement with spiritual forces was detectable in this fashioning. Initiated into London's Isis Urania Temple, Sharp was participant in the elite hermetic practices and ceremonial magic of the highly secretive Order of the Golden Dawn in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Established in 1888 and drawing its membership from the urban middle-classes, the Order synthesised a number of occult traditions—Renaissance and Egyptian magic, Western esotericism, Neoplatonism and Rosicrucianism—to produce a unique system of magical training for its initiated adepts. Though similarly invested in the exploration of worlds beyond the terrestrial, this new occultism distinguished itself from the passive mediumship encouraged by spiritualism through the cultivation of

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<sup>19</sup> W. B. Yeats to Maud Gonne, 14 Jan. 1907, *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893-1938: Always Your Friend*, eds. Anna MacBride and A. Norman Jeffares (London: Hutchinson, 1992), pp. 234-235

<sup>20</sup> Only five editions of *Evergreen* were published between 1895 and 1896. The journal was internationalist in its outlook and symbolist in its artistic tone. It published works by French, Scottish and Gaelic writers and aimed to reinstate Scotland and particularly Edinburgh as a key cultural force in Europe

<sup>21</sup> Terry L. Myers, *The Sexual Tensions of William Sharp: A Study of the Birth of Fiona MacLeod, Incorporating Two Lost Worlds, 'Ariadne in Naxos' and 'Beatrice'* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 4 and Flavia Alaya, *William Sharp—'Fiona Macleod': 1855-1905* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970)

<sup>22</sup> Edith Roth Wheeler, 'Fiona Macleod', *Fortnightly Review* (November 1919), 780-790

technique: members were schooled in the methods of astral travel, incantation and scrying in order to gain access to their own divine beings. The creation of the Fiona Macleod myth should thus be read in light of Sharp's participation in these exploratory practices, as an expression of what he described as his 'truest self, the self who is below all other selves'.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, this mystical other self was specifically the product of a movement within the Order itself toward the study of Celtic mythology and symbolism. Initiated by one of the three founding members, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, and enthusiastically taken up by Yeats, the Celtic Mystical Order proposed astral explorations into the legends and myths of the ancient Celt. William Sharp's mythic authorship existed at the intersection between these developing magical trajectories and their expression in the literary turn towards Gaelic cultures.

This chapter seeks to delineate and draw together several historical trajectories: the SPR's investigation into second sight, the Celtic Revival's appropriation of Scottish folk culture, and the evolution of 'inner vision' in the nascent techniques of practical magic. Uniting these narratives are the complex authorial identities negotiated by Ada Goodrich-Freer and William Sharp, both of which were acted out in relation to wider discursive constructions of peripheral northern histories and cultures. Helpful to this discussion is Alison Butler's reading of the Golden Dawn as reliant upon 'invented tradition' or 'a set of practices of a ritual or symbolic nature governed by rules that seek to establish certain values and standards of behaviour through repetition of these practices'.<sup>24</sup> Considered in relation to one of its original critical iterations—namely, Hugh Trevor-Roper's analysis of the solidification of a Scottish national identity around a romanticised and de-politicised version of Highland history—the invented traditions of Victorian occultism offer a way of thinking back to eighteenth-century configurations of second sight's imageries and narratives. Yet while Butler insists the folklore movement 'does not appear to have had as much influence on the esoterically inclined with its emphasis upon nature-based religious rituals and folk custom and belief', the reading pursued here makes the case for the institutionalised study of folk beliefs as in actuality deeply

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<sup>23</sup> William Sharp quoted by Elizabeth A. Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), p. 227

<sup>24</sup> Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 173-174. For a useful overview see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004) and R. A. Gilbert *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1987)

implicated in the production of practical magic.<sup>25</sup> The proposed Celtic Mystical Order presented a particularly strong case for the inclusion of folk tradition in this history: finding in the ballads, ceremonies and tales of the modern Celt, the fragmented remains of an ancient system of belief, occultism frequently blurred the boundary between ethnography and spirituality. Importantly, this involved a reading of folklore that emphasised both the reality and reproducibility of its preternatural structures; so that accounts of second sight became not only evidence of unique psychological abilities, but instructive guides to the cultivation of visionary techniques. This chapter seeks to chart a movement from passive ability toward occult technique, understood in relation to the narratives offered by psychological research and the primitivism undergirding second sight's discursive and etymological transformations at the *fin de siècle*

#### 5.1 THE IDEAL FIELDWORKER AND THE 'ONLY' HIGHLAND NOVELIST

In one of a series of essays published in 1899 under the heading *Psychical Research*, Ada Goodrich-Freer included a history of the Catholic monk, Saint Columba, and his evangelising mission among the Picts. Describing him as the 'Father of Second Sight', she marked out a lineage that connected his sixth-century religious prophecies to the strange visionary experiences of modern Highlanders.<sup>26</sup> Where the predictions of Columba were described as having been made in 'so small a community as that of the monastery in Iona' where there could be no 'temptation to misrepresent or exaggerate', the difficulties of contemporary research were conversely attributed to seers now being forced into 'living among an incredulous and critical public where reaction from the unfaith of the outer world might produce superstition within'.<sup>27</sup> The 'careful and accurate narration' of the Highlander is never brought into question, and instead issues of accuracy or exaggeration are situated firmly with the imagined spectator. Deriding tourists who, 'during the season, invade the shores of Iona to 'do the sights' in an hour and twenty minutes' and who by their gullibility encourage 'the

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<sup>26</sup> Saint Columba (521-597) was a monk and one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland who evangelised to the Picts during the Early Medieval period. He built several churches through the Hebrides and founded a monastery on Iona. His prophecies were collected first in *Vita Columba* by the ninth Abbot of Iona in the 700s, and Columba was co-opted by eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers in search of early examples of second sight

<sup>27</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer, 'Saint Columba: The Father of Second Sight' in *Essays in Psychical Research* (London: George Redway, 1899), p. 299

natives [to] ask extortionate prices for the smallest service', Goodrich-Freer distanced her own appreciation of the subject from that of the boorish and ill-informed 'Yankee' or 'Cockney' visitor.<sup>28</sup> Implicit in this account was the division of scientific and amateur observational strategies, one that privileged knowledge garnered by the former and denigrated the latter as untrained. A frequent contributor to the Folklore Society and a prominent member of Royal Geographic Society, the author's institutional affiliations and the authority these underwrote her somewhat snobbish assessment of the 'loud voiced' day-tripper.<sup>29</sup>

Though keen to distinguish herself from the uninformed tourist, Goodrich-Freer was also unwilling to fully inhabit the role of the detached and 'objective' witness, and was thus equally critical of 'the *mere* psychical researcher, for whom a story is of no value unless attested by two independent witnesses'.<sup>30</sup> Instead the author used this essay to make the case for herself as the ideal fieldworker, one versed in the expectations of empiricist method yet attuned to the narrative rhythms of the folk tale, and one capable of negotiating both outside and inside constellations of knowledge. Picturing the second-sighted prophecy as 'like the gray rocks, tossed and scattered upon this little island of Iona; shattered, broken, distorted', she mediated between their status as 'fragments of the past' or 'abiding testimony to the mysteries of nature' and their potential to document lived experience.<sup>31</sup> Under this rubric, stories gathered on the island from the 'boatmen and farm labourers' constituted a form of witnessing situated in a hermeneutic middle ground between personal experience and orally recounted tale or fable.<sup>32</sup> In the first statement she delivered to the SPR on the progress of her research, Goodrich-Freer was at pains to emphasise the difficulties involved in obtaining 'first-hand testimony' of this kind. It is not only the 'native reticence' of the Highlander, she explained, but also the 'secret reverence and awe' in which the phenomenon of second sight is held, that makes the collection of serviceable data a challenging task. As such evidence can 'be obtained only by living among the people and cultivating personal relations with them'.<sup>33</sup> It was this methodological demand for proximity that defined the conditions of the investigation, and necessitated a closer dialogue between psychical research,

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<sup>28</sup> Freer, 'Saint Columba', p. 298

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 298

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 320

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 324

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. pp. 300-1

<sup>33</sup> *JSPR* 7 (January 1895), 3

institutional folklore and anthropology. What is more, respecting Henrika Kuklick's contention that in the closing decades of the nineteenth century anthropologists began to 'embrace field methods as one element in their strategy of adaptive accommodation to the intellectual ecology of the day', it is arguable that these conditions were also stipulated in response to broader methodological trends.<sup>34</sup>

In reflection of the competing epistemological demands of these disciplines, Goodrich-Freer's research embodied multiple and often conflicting generic properties; a discursive negotiation that was most evident in her attempts to marshal different modes of testimony under the stylistic conventions of psychical research. Reiterated in private letters and in interim reports given at several General Meetings of the Society, was the impossibility of making the second-sighted narrative conform to the standards of evidence usually upheld by in the *Proceeding of the Society for Psychical Research*. 'The Woman and the Shroud', published as part of Miss X's *Borderland* report was typical of the type of material collected over the course of the investigation:

The doctor instanced the case of a woman, known to himself, who had gone to the dressmakers to be fitted for a new gown. When she had gone, a companion of the dressmaker observed, 'Te need na hurry wi' the frock. Did ye no see she had her shroud on her?', and before the gown was finished the woman was dead<sup>35</sup>

Undated and arriving without the corroboration of other witnesses, the story failed to match veridical conditions set by earlier studies. More pressing though were the newly encountered difficulties of work carried out in 'unfrequented districts'. Jeffery J. Kripal has credited the Society with having stayed home to 'anthropologize their own English countryside' on the assumption of the 'Enlightenment principle of shared humanity or psychic substratum'.<sup>36</sup> What this does not allow for, however, are the disavowals and exclusions implicit in this strategy: for the SPR 'shared humanity' was primarily composed by the experiences of a highly select social group.

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<sup>34</sup> Henrika Kuklick, 'After Ishmael: The Fieldwork Tradition and its Future', in *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Site*, eds. James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 47-65 (47)

<sup>35</sup> Miss X, 'Second Sight in the Highlands', *Borderland* 2 (January, 1895), 56-59 (58)

<sup>36</sup> Jeffery J. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 55



Written into the founding 'Objects of the Society' was the desire to 'conduct their investigations as far as possible through private channels' and in practical terms this translated into reliance upon the contributions of its middle and upper class readers.<sup>37</sup> As Roger Luckhurst has noted this epistolary data was shaped by exclusionary practices aimed at procuring information from right type of correspondent, so that class comes to inform 'both the content and threshold for inclusion'.<sup>38</sup> Needless to say the Gaelic-speaking Highlander did not fit the profile of a reliable observer, as established implicating and explicitly by the Society. Consequently the problems encountered with regard to evidence were largely situated with the witness, rather than with phenomena itself: to extract from a people, Goodrich-Freer complained, 'apparently destitute of a sense of time, and having few events from which to date occurrences, dates more exact than 'thereafter' or 'heretofore' is a labour demanding all possible tact and patience'.<sup>39</sup> That no report of the 'Enquiry into Second Sight in the Highlands' ever appeared in the publically available *PSPR* might be taken to indicate that these difficulties could not in the end be overcome.

This should not be taken to indicate that the results of the inquiry enjoyed no public platform. Rather, where the *SPR* refused to publish such 'insufficient material', William T. Stead's *Borderland* included several lengthy reports on the Highland journeying of its co-editor Miss X. Established in 1893, this short-lived periodical typically ran articles on topics like spiritualism, theosophy, Eastern magic, palmistry and fortune telling, alongside reports on the most recent discoveries of psychical research and experimental psychology. In addition to these lead articles, each issue also featured character sketches, news on recent developments in the study of the supernatural, letters to the editor and a directory of psychics.<sup>40</sup> Having been introduced by Myers in September of 1891, Goodrich-Freer and Stead formed a quite extraordinary editorial partnership, with their meetings frequently conducted through automatic writing. 'I can, and do constantly', Stead assured his readers, 'receive messages from my assistant editor, Miss X., as accurately and constantly as I receive

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<sup>37</sup> 'Objects of the Society', *PSPR* 1 (1882-3), 4

<sup>38</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 150

<sup>39</sup> *JSPR* 7 (January, 1896) 184

<sup>40</sup> Joseph O. Baylen, 'W.T. Stead's *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index of Psychic Phenomena* 1893-1897', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 4.1 (April, 1969) 30-35

telegrams'.<sup>41</sup> Contributing articles on crystal gazing, premonitions and hypnotic phenomena, this telepathic sub-editor came to prominence after apparently receiving a message from the recently deceased explorer Sir Richard Burton, which accurately predicted the day of his wife's death in 1896.<sup>42</sup>

On what conclusions should be drawn from this remarkable happening, however, Stead and Miss X diverged. Where the former was willing to allow for the possibility of something close to spirit communication at work, the latter took up the sceptical language of psychical research to avow that: 'I am by no means convinced that I have had any communication, direct or indirect, with the spirit of Sir Richard Burton', and that while it may have been 'convenient to assume the existence of some outside entity', it was more likely attributable to 'externalisations of sub-conscious information'.<sup>43</sup> Reflecting on this interpretive division after Stead's death aboard the Titanic in 1912, Goodrich-Freer claimed not only to have exercised a tempering influence on her employer's eccentricities, but also to have, at the behest of Myers, represented the interests of psychical representative at the spiritualist journal.<sup>44</sup>

Somewhat characteristically, *Strange Things* makes much of 'Miss Freer's' supposed 'disloyalty' to her former employer, as Trevor Hall accuses: 'As early as June 1894 when she saw the better opportunity offered by the patronage of Lord Bute [...] she found it convenient to deny emphatically that she was an 'adherent of Steadism'.<sup>45</sup> While some of the private remarks reproduced gleefully by Hall do at times appear unkind or certainly ungenerous, these reflect upon the difficulties inherent in negotiating a space for her work between increasingly antagonistic factions. Writing in the first number, Stead made explicit the populist sentiment at the heart of his new project: the journal was to be 'a medium of communication' between the 'scientific expert' and the 'great mass of ordinary people'.<sup>46</sup> By democratising the 'study of the spook', *Borderland* would do for the 'great public' what

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<sup>41</sup> William T. Stead, 'How We Intend to Study Borderland', *Borderland* 1 (July 1893), 6

<sup>42</sup> Miss X, 'Some Thoughts on Automatism', *Borderland* 3 (April 1896) and 'More About the Burton Messages', *Borderland* 4 (January 1897). See on a related theme, Shane McCorristine, 'The Spectral Place of the Franklin Expedition in Contemporary Culture', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Culture* (forthcoming)

<sup>43</sup> Miss X, 'Some Thoughts on Automatism', *Borderland* 3 (April 1896), 168 and *The Westminster Budget* 24 December 1896

<sup>44</sup> Goodrich-Freer's memoir in Edith K. Harper, *Stead: The Man. Personal Reminiscences* (London: William Rider, 1914), p. 64

<sup>45</sup> Trevor Hall, *The Strange Story of Ada Goodrich Freer*, p. 142

<sup>46</sup> William T. Stead, 'Seeking Counsel of the Wise. What Think Ye of the Study of Borderland?', *Borderland* 1 (July 1893) 7

the ‘Society for Psychical Research has done for the select few’: it would facilitate the kinds of plebeian experimentation associated with phrenology, mesmerism and most recently, spiritualism.<sup>47</sup> As is glimpsed in the somewhat accusatory tone adopted in this early statement, relations between Stead and the organisation whose work he was so intent on disseminating, were often less than civil. While the journalist accused the SPR of adopting a Brahman-like air of exclusivity, for many within the Society Stead’s project threatened to strip psychical research of its hard-won respectability by conflating it with a broad church occultism.<sup>48</sup>

Particularly illustrative were the significant disparities in the tone and content of the second sight reports printed in the *JSPR* and those written up specifically for *Borderland*. Where those in the house journal sidelined stories of predictions to focus instead upon the investigation’s methodological difficulties and taxonomic possibilities, in its public form the opposite was true, with the most space given over to fascinating accounts of fulfilled prophecies and deathly omens. Respecting the founding principle of *Borderland*, that while there may be few capable of ‘judging and analysing’ psychical phenomena, the ‘collection of evidence’ must ‘necessarily be entrusted to a multitude of witnesses’, it is arguable that Stead’s participatory rhetoric took seriously testimony deemed ‘unfit’ for the epistemological purposes of psychical research.<sup>49</sup> The stories printed by the periodical ran along fairly traditional lines: a minister called to the bed of a dying woman by the wraith of her husband, a prophecy of English invasion fulfilled during the Crofter’s ‘agitation’ of 1889, winding sheets and funeral processions observed.<sup>50</sup> Yet these remained, significantly, under the legitimising heading of ‘psychical research’. As such, though the Society may not have found evidence of second sight compelling or substantial enough for publication, they remained publically affiliated with it nonetheless. Thinking about what Thomas Gieryn has termed the ‘boundary-work’ involved in modern science, whereby its proponents attempt to distinguish their work from other forms knowledge circulating in the public sphere, *Borderland’s* un-regulated programme of democratisation and

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<sup>47</sup> William T. Stead, ‘How We Intend to Study Borderland’, *Borderland* 1 (July 1893), 5

<sup>48</sup> See Roger Luckhurst ‘Making Connections: W.T. Stead’s Occult Economies’ in *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 5

<sup>50</sup> Miss X, ‘Second Sight in the Highlands’, *Borderland* 2 (January 1895), 56-59

dissemination might be read as problematic to the SPR's attempts at this kind of 'demarcation'.<sup>51</sup>

Developing a new technical language to describe experimental phenomena, instituting a system of peer review and publishing a journal of its findings, psychical research imbibed forms of public presentation and legitimising signifiers common to a mainstream scientific institution. Following the exposure of several fraudulent mediums in the early 1880s, Richard Hodgson's damning assessment of the Theosophical Society's Madame Blavatsky, and the resignation of prominent spiritualist members, the SPR had, by the time of the second-sight investigation, distanced itself from the religiously heterodox or occult.<sup>52</sup> Or rather, in pressing for the resignation of members like Edward Dawson Rodgers and William Stainton Moses, the Society had sought to define more clearly its role as a scientific observer of spiritualist phenomena, rather than a participant or believer. With this in mind, it is perhaps surprising given her experiments with crystal vision and spirit communication that Miss X was chosen to lead the Scottish expedition. As G. W. Lambert notes, her involvement with *Borderland* and her status as a 'practicing clairvoyant', made Goodrich-Freer more of a 'suitable subject for investigation than 'an investigator'.<sup>53</sup> Yet as is revealed in her frequent contributions to the *PSPR*, prior to the second-sight inquiry Goodrich-Freer had cultivated a reputation as a sceptical and clear-eyed examiner of her own psychical experience. In papers like 'On the Apparent Sources of Subliminal Messages' and 'Recent Experiments in Crystal Vision', she sought to examine these topics from 'point of view of the Subject' rather than the 'more familiar' position of the 'spectator'.<sup>54</sup> In doing so she revealed not only an extensive knowledge of the historical and anthropological context of her remarkable visionary talents, but also an awareness of appropriate psychical

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Gieryn, 'Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science for Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists', *American Sociological Review* 48.6 (December 1983), 781-95 (781). Also relevant here is Roy Wallis's discussion of 'sanitization' as the efforts of 'pseudoscience' to achieve authority in the public sphere by adopting the language and methods of mainstream science, see 'Science and Pseudo-Science', *Social Science Information* 24.3 (1985), 585-601

<sup>52</sup> As Joy Dixon describes, Richard Hodgson was dispatched to India and sought to establish the veracity of the theosophist's spiritual teachings: 'Employing methods worthy of his fictional contemporary Sherlock Holmes, Hodgson collected written and oral statements from both 'European' and 'native' informants, and amassed a wealth of physical evidence', after which he 'dismissed Blavatsky as an ingenious fraudster', *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2001), p. 105

<sup>53</sup> G.W. Lambert, 'Stranger Things: Some Reflections on Reading 'Strange Things' by John L. Campbell and Trevor H. Hall', *JSPR* 45 (June 1969), 43-55 (44)

<sup>54</sup> Miss X, 'On the Apparent Sources of Subliminal Messages', *PSPR* 11 (1895) 114-144 (114)

terminology and conceptual frameworks. Recognising the interrelation between stylistic and evidential requirements, she avowed that: 'My experiences [...] have little of the marvellous; they are all of a most ordinary nature; they claim no merit but that of being carefully observed and recorded'.<sup>55</sup> As was indicated by Henry Sidgwick's praise of Goodrich-Freer as one who combined the 'power of self-observation and analysis' with the 'capacity for supernormal perception', her claimed visionary powers did not necessarily preclude the exercise of scientific authority.<sup>56</sup>

There was, however, a detectable change in this open-minded position in the aftermath of the controversial Ballechin House investigation. From February to April of 1897, Goodrich-Freer was resident at this reputedly haunted Perthshire home, and in collaboration with Lord Bute published an account of the experience, *The Alleged Haunting of B— House* (1899). Although the investigation was instigated by the SPR and with the enthusiastic support of several prominent members, when a public debate over Ballechin flared up in *The Times* in June 1897, the Society was quick to detach itself from the affair. Begun by an article titled 'On the Trail of a Ghost', in which an unnamed guest at the house claimed that it had no local reputation for being haunted, the 'whole thing had been fudged up in London' with fraudulent results produced by their 'charming hostess', the controversy raged through the 'Letters to the Editor' until November of that year.<sup>57</sup> Writing to *The Times* on 10 June 1897, Myers attempted to play down his involvement by claiming to have decided on first visiting the house that 'there was no evidence as could justify us in giving the results of the inquiry a place in our *Proceedings*' and requesting that his letters on the subject not be published.<sup>58</sup> This disavowal placed some distance between the SPR and Goodrich-Freer, which arguably culminated in a scathing review of *The Alleged Haunting of B— House* written by Frank Podmore and printed in the *PSPR* in 1899. While Podmore allowed that other factors may have contributed to the poor evidential grounding of this investigation, he attributed primary blame to Goodrich-Freer's observational abilities. Her 'testimony to ghostly sights and sounds fails to impress because she is liable, in a quite unusual degree, to hallucinatory experience'. Though she is not 'responsible for this mental idiosyncrasy' Podmore continued, it

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<sup>55</sup> 'On the Apparent Sources of Subliminal Messages', 114

<sup>56</sup> Henry Sidgwick's comments on 'The Apparent Sources of Supernormal Experiences' as delivered at Westminster Town Hall 8 June 1894, *JSPR* (June, 1894), 261

<sup>57</sup> 'On the Trail of a Ghost', *The Times* 8 June 1897

<sup>58</sup> *The Times* 10 June 1897

nonetheless ‘seriously impairs the value of her testimony to experiences which owe their interest for most readers, solely on the presumption that they may not be of a purely hallucinatory order’.<sup>59</sup> Under particular conditions then, her ‘supernormal perception’ was an extraordinary aid to scientific enquiry, while in others this sensitivity composed an almost pathological debilitation that prevented her from witnessing phenomena objectively.<sup>60</sup> Underscored by this later controversy is the highly precarious nature of the authority negotiated by Miss X in relation to the SPR, and namely the problematic negotiation of the roles of psychical subject and object.

Respecting the criticism, significantly made after the Ballechin House controversy, of ‘the *mere* psychical researcher’ who fails to appreciate the local nuances of the folklore narrative, it is arguable that Goodrich-Freer inhabited a similarly complex position in relation to second sight.<sup>61</sup> Evident throughout her investigation was an attempt to conciliate two seemingly oppositional perspectives. On the one hand, she constantly reiterated her subject as remote, primitive and unmistakably ‘other’. Engaging in taxonomic and classificatory processes, Goodrich-Freer began her investigations by attempting to realise the phenomenon in topographical terms: to this end she ‘bought an ordinance map of Scotland, and carefully marked in coloured chalks every place of which we had had any reports, in the various degrees of promise held out to us’.<sup>62</sup> Emphasising her movement through both physical and temporal space, we learn that she has travelled to increasingly ‘unfrequented districts’, where everything is ‘unfamiliar—the language, the customs, the system of commerce by barter, the intensely primitive construction of the houses—even the natural features of the island’.<sup>63</sup> Attending to Edward Said’s description of anthropology as a discipline ‘historically constituted and constructed in its point of origin during an ethnographic encounter between a sovereign European observer and a non-European native occupying [...] a lesser status and a distant

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<sup>59</sup> Frank Podmore, *The Alleged Haunting of B— House, including a journal kept during the tenancy of Colonel Le Mesurier Taylor*, *PSPR* 15 (1899), 98-100 (99)

<sup>60</sup> See Hilary Grimes, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) pp. 83-111 for an analysis of the Ballechin House controversy and the particularly gendered implications of the dismissal of the evidence gathered by Goodrich-Freer during her tenure there

<sup>61</sup> Goodrich-Freer, ‘Saint Columba’, p. 298

<sup>62</sup> ‘Second Sight in the Highlands: A Provisional Report by Miss X’, *Borderland* 2 (January 1895), 56-59 (56)

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 57

place', it is possible to detect a similar dynamic at play in this reading of the Highland life as somehow reminiscent of an earlier period of civilisation.<sup>64</sup>

Writing in an article for *Folklore*, she described 'the 'curious mixture of religion and superstition' that greets the visitor to the Outer Hebrides who:

Realises, as in perhaps few other places, what life must have been in early days when Christianity was first superinduced upon Paganism. Here there has been, moreover, the curious complication of a Christianity rooted in the hearts of a people, who were then left without teachers, without books, without, practically, any written language, for nearly three centuries<sup>65</sup>

Reiterated here are the familiar generic hallmarks of the travel narrative, as established by texts like Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775) and echoed by various ethnographic regimes through the nineteenth century: the landscape is wild, barren and uncultivated, the people superstitious, isolated and primitive. Without adhering to an excessively diagrammatic model of 'internal colonisation' then, in re-establishing this version of rural northern identity created and consumed by the imperial metropolis, Goodrich-Freer's folkloric work could be accused of having elided the political, cultural and linguistic disenfranchisements imposed on these communities in favour of a romanticised vision of Highland life.<sup>66</sup>

Complicating this is the constant negotiation and renegotiation of proximity played out in her reading of second sight. Looking to distinguish herself from the casual visitor, who believes 'that all the men north of the Tweed' wear 'kilts and talk [in] the language of Burns', Goodrich-Freer sought out 'the most remote spots accessible, avoiding the tourist and everything adapted to his use' and in doing so laid claim to local constellations of knowledge.<sup>67</sup> Far from maintaining distance from her subject, in the guise of a participant-observer she attempted to cultivate propinquity

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<sup>64</sup> Edward Said, 'Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Winter, 1989), 211-12

<sup>65</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer, 'The Powers of Evil in the Outer Hebrides', *Folklore* 10.3 (September, 1899), 259-282 (260)

<sup>66</sup> See Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonisation: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1800-1997* (Berkeley: University Press, 1975), which interprets uneven patterns of industrialization as reflecting already embedded inequalities in the geographical distribution of wealth in Britain. Further, Hechter maintains this is played out in what he describes as the 'cultural division of labor' existing between core and peripheral cultures, and in the 'ethnonationalism' that develops in response to this inequality

<sup>67</sup> 'Second Sight in the Highlands: The Second Report of Miss X', *Borderland* 3 (January 1897), 51-61 (61)

by laying claim to a shared genealogy and cultural identity. In addition to citing ‘Scottish ancestry’ and a childhood spent ‘far away in the North’, she also claimed an affinity based on common psychical powers.<sup>68</sup> These provoke, she claims, ‘a slight feeling of awe’ in her Highland interviewees and ‘a recognition of power as adepts in their own line’.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, special visionary abilities appear to solve some of the methodological difficulties presented by the second-sight investigation. As while it is ‘of no use marching into the house of a reputed Seer armed with a pencil and notebook and submitting him to a searching cross-examination’, one possessed of similar gifts cannot be ‘palmed off’ with stories reserved ‘for the amateur who likes a little folklore’.<sup>70</sup> Enacted as a kind of personal transformation, whereby Goodrich-Freer was enabled to speak from periphery to the centre through the adoption of a particular racial and cultural inheritance, she fashioned an ideal field researcher, one capable of navigating local and universal modes of perception. As Campbell and Hall have recognised and duly pilloried, this project is at heart one of appropriation, which entailed both a specific act of plagiarism in relation to the work of Fr. Allan Macdonald and, more generally, the instrumentalisation of a peculiarly theatricalised ‘Highland’ identity. Yet Goodrich-Freer was far from the only mystically inclined London-dweller to adopt such an identity. Rather her construction of an ancestrally Scottish persona must be read in the context of a broader turn to ‘Celtic’ themes in *fin de siècle* culture.

A review printed by *The Academy* in 1897 observed that in ‘these days it is not easy to conceal the identity of a writer. But the author of *The Sin Eater* has succeeded to a remarkable degree in shrouding herself in the dim mystery of the wild Celtic nature’.<sup>71</sup> The limited critical response to William Sharp’s remarkable project of literary self-disguise has so far made much of the transvestitism at play in its execution. Terry L. Myers, for instance, reads the author’s ‘trans-gendering’ as both representative of ‘the playing out of the psychological strains that are clear in his biography’ and as a reflection of the ‘rapidly intensifying pressures on gender and sexual identity in the 1880s and 1890s’, while Flavia Alaya interprets his ‘habit of associating the sexual relationship with violent or fatal consequences in his fiction’ to

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<sup>68</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer, ‘Hobson Jobson’, *Nineteenth Century* (April 1902), 585

<sup>69</sup> Miss X, ‘Second Sight in the Highlands: A Provisional Report’, *Borderland 2* (January 1895), 57

<sup>70</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer to Lord Bute 8 August 1894 cited in *Strange Things*, p. 54 and ‘Second Sight in the Highlands’ 57

<sup>71</sup> ‘Fiona Macleod’, *The Academy* (May 1897), 525-36 (525)



an early 'tendency to homosexuality'.<sup>72</sup> Though such readings usefully allow for an analysis of the ways in which this doubling may have both reflected and troubled the stern binaries of Victorian sexual morality, their necessarily narrow focus fails to account for what this twinning might have to say to the 'dim mystery of the wild Celtic nature'.

Most immediately evident is not the gender play involved in this literary persona, but the transformation of a Lowland-born, English speaking writer into a Gaelic-speaking Highlander. In this creative self-disguise Sharp employed a comparable set of strategies to those accessed by Goodrich-Freer in her construction of the ideal Highland fieldworker, similarly enacted in order to legitimise the author as bearer of local knowledge and a disseminator of folk culture to a cosmopolitan public. Describing a trip through the Highlands, for example, Macleod recounted her pleasure in hearing 'by the hearthside or looking down into green water or on the upland road that strings glen upon glen along its white swaying way: of the old tales and poems of beauty and wonder', and discussing her childhood she recalled how the power of second sight 'has been a reality to me almost from my cradle, for my Highland nurse had the faculty'.<sup>73</sup> Comfortably situated in the dramatic landscape, welcomed into the homes of her neighbours and intimately connected to the lore of the Gaelic north, the imagined ramblings of his female persona allowed Sharp to cultivate the appearance of cultural proximity rather than anthropological distance.

Writing in an article published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1900, Macleod joined Goodrich-Freer in celebrating the second-sighted visions of St. Columba and the dramatic windswept landscape of Iona. However the differences between these accounts, both in terms of content and style, were revelatory of the distance separating the concerns of the folklorist from those of the Revivalist. Where Goodrich-Freer's interest lay primarily with the experiences of the island's modern day inhabitants and the possibly pernicious influence of outsiders on their traditional way of life, Macleod looked backwards to 'the sacred island of the Druids' and

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<sup>72</sup> Terry L. Myers, *The Sexual Tensions of William Sharp: A Study of the Birth of Fiona MacLeod, Incorporating Two Lost Worlds, 'Ariadne in Naxos' and 'Beatrice'* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 4 and Flavia Alaya, *William Sharp—Fiona Macleod: 1855-1905* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 116. While Myers constructs an account of Sharp based on this reading, it should be noted that Alaya is much more cautious and acknowledges that her use of the term 'homosexual [...] is in fact misleading, owing to the vast spectrum of latent and overt behaviour it is made to cover in its careless modern usage' (116)

<sup>73</sup> Fiona Macleod, 'The Sunset of Old Tales', *Fortnightly Review* (Jan, 1903), 1087-1100 (1088)

accessed, through etymological analysis, a ‘pre-Columban’ history and ancient form of knowledge.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, while the psychological researcher’s discussion of second sight was largely based upon questions of narrative, testimony and standards of evidence, the Highland poet situated her account of this ‘quickened inward vision’ and ‘serene perspicuity’ in terms of questions of ‘spiritual law’.<sup>75</sup> Enacted here is not only a recuperation of peasant culture, but also a radical shift in the type of meaning and potential agencies ascribed to folklore itself. By resurrecting a native literature grounded in fables, ceremonies and pre-Christian beliefs, writers affiliated with a broadly composed Celtic Renaissance, looked to reframe indigenous folk culture as a vital political and creative resource, through which the innate spirituality of the peasantry was made manifest. As such we are told by Elizabeth Sharp, who published a biography of her husband after his death, that Macleod’s Highland stories, composed from ‘barbaric tales and myths of old Celtic days, recaptured in dreams’, were written with the express purpose of encouraging ‘natural racial talent’ through the presentation of the ‘old Celtic tongue’ and ‘old literatures’.<sup>76</sup> Identified by *The Irish Independent* as the ‘one and only Highland novelist’, Macleod was charged with the literary revitalisation of a marginalised and imperially denigrated culture.<sup>77</sup>

In his review of Macleod’s *Green Fire* (1896)—a novel set between Brittany and the Outer Hebrides—Andrew Lang complained that ‘the windy, wailing indistinct’ romance ‘is pertinaciously bent on being ‘Ossianic’.<sup>78</sup> As we noted in the previous chapter Lang was not exactly immune to the notion of an identifiably ‘Scottish’ literary temperament, and during his extensive discussion of the romance genre the heroic legends, folktales and ballads of his homeland served as frequent points of reference. Yet the Scotch polymath remained openly dismissive of the Celtic Revival and what he perceived as the nostalgic in-authenticity underwriting the movement. His impatience lay primarily with their reinvigoration of racialist theories regarding the division between Celtic and Teutonic literatures, previously explicated in Matthew Arnold’s *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). Reading creative praxis as the expression of innate psychological traits, Revivalists problematically engaged in a

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<sup>74</sup> Fiona Macleod, ‘Iona’, *Fortnightly Review* (April 1900), 692-709

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 698

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth A. Sharp, *William Sharp*, p. 252 and 256. The Highland stories appeared in two of collections, *The Gipsy Christ and Other Tales* (1895) and *The Sin-Eater and Other Tales* (1895) and in a series of novels, *Pbaraisi* (1894), *Mountain Lovers* (1895), *The Laughter of Peterkin* (1895), *The Washer of the Ford* (1896), *By Sundown Shores* (1900) and *The Divine Adventure* (1900)

<sup>77</sup> *The Irish Independent* cited by Elizabeth Sharp, p. 6

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘Green Fire’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (February 1897), 189-190 (189)

reiteration of a vision of the Celt as ‘undisciplined, anarchical and turbulent’, yet poetically gifted and spiritually minded.<sup>79</sup> Situated against the materialism of the Saxon, the ‘Celtic writer’ was described in an essay by Macleod as, ‘the writer the temper of whose mind is more ancient, more primitive, and in a sense more natural than that of his compatriot in whom the Teutonic spirit prevails’.<sup>80</sup> Recapitulating the bifurcation of rationality from spirituality, the Celt was imagined as providing—through their folklore and literature—a direct route to primitive and pre-Christian wisdom. Recognising in this project the spectre of ‘that unlovely enchantress, Popular Science’, Lang characterised the ‘Neo-Celtic’ movement as little more than an attempt ‘to claim all that is best and rarest in English literature as due to the Celtic element’ under the guise of highly questionable racialist theories.<sup>81</sup>

Attendant on this desire for ‘something atavistically Celtic’ was the characterisation of second sight as a distinctly ‘Celtic gift’ bound up with national creative practices. For Lang, schooled in the dictates of comparative anthropology, this was a laughable delusion: as one ‘might as well call epilepsy a Celtic gift. Every savage—the Maori, the Red Indian, the Zulu—is as full of the second sight as any man of Moidart’.<sup>82</sup> The recuperation of racial identities underpinned by notions of imaginative or visionary capacity, had significant bearing on the interpretation of second-sight narratives at the turn of the century, and Lang’s antagonism towards Macleod’s primitivist tendencies speaks to the frequently discordant relationship between established folkloric practice and the mystical re-appropriations enacted by the Celtic Renaissance. While Gregory Castle is right to draw our attention to the reliance of Revivalists upon the conceptual machinery of the ethnographic participant-observer and to warn us that ‘the danger of collusion with anthropology was not only unavoidable but to some degree constitutive of their various projects of cultural redemption’, this complicity needs to be considered as also mutually transformative.<sup>83</sup> In the introduction to his *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1890), for instance, William Butler Yeats characterised the scientific pretensions of

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<sup>79</sup> Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867), p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> Fiona Macleod, ‘A Group of Celtic Writers’, *The Fortnightly Review* 71 (1899), 34-48 (36)

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘The Celtic Renaissance’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (February 1897), 181-191 (187, 188, 191). See also ‘At the Sign of the Ship’, *Longman’s Magazine* (Dec. 1896) 196-204, in which Lang criticises the Irish writer George Moore along similar lines, ‘Mr. Moore’s abilities are wasted, as I shall try to show, first because he adopts certain theories of popular science as to the influence of race on letters; next because he does not know his facts’ (191)

<sup>82</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘The Celtic Renaissance’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (February 1897), 181-191 (187 and 188)

<sup>83</sup> Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 9

institutional folklore as amounting to little more than a desire for tales ‘full of little coat hooks, as it were, to hang theories’ or ‘tales in the form of grocers’ bills—item fairy king, item the queen’; a sentiment echoed in Macleod’s distain for those ‘who go penciling through the Highlands or from isle to isle’ and her assertion that ‘the tale or song thus sought loses its charm for me’.<sup>84</sup> Rather than confined by the strictures of established disciplines, the political and creative aspirations of the Revival actively problematised their nomenclatural imperatives. Setting his own studies in opposition to the work of the so-called ‘honest folk-lorists’, Yeats explained his antagonism as arising, ‘not because his versions are accurate, but because they are inaccurate, or rather incomplete. What lover of Celtic lore has not been filled up with a sacred rage when he comes upon exquisite story, dear to his childhood, written out in newspaper English and called science?’.<sup>85</sup> Engaging issues of ownership, national identity and cultural appropriation, this critique was also concerned with a misreading of folk tales that placed them, falsely, within the realm of the quantifiable or describable. Rather, as he insists elsewhere, such traditions speak to some ‘fibrous darkness, into some matrix out of which everything has come’, to ancient and pagan systems of knowledge; they represent, ‘the voice of the people, the very voice of life’, and a route to self-knowledge mediated through ethnographic inquiry.<sup>86</sup>

This is not to suggest, however, that Revivalists fostered an entirely oppositional relationship to folklore, rather their critique of the scientific pretensions of its institutions was one mirrored by internal conflicts over the purpose and proper subject of folklore collection. Pertinently, the latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed attempts by Gaelic-speaking folklorists like Rev. John Gregorson Campbell, a Free Church minister of Tiree and Coll, Rev. James McDougall and Fr. Allan MacDonald—who we have already encountered helping the SPR with their investigations—to collect descriptions of non-Christian beliefs, incantations, spells and hymns, transcribed from oral sources, and to demonstrate their continued

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<sup>84</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (London: Walter Scott, 1890), xiv and Fiona Macleod, ‘The Sunset of Old Tales’, *Fortnightly Review* (Jan, 1903), 1087-1100 (1088)

<sup>85</sup> W.B. Yeats in reply to Rev. Percy Myles in John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson eds., *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats Vol. II: Reviews, Articles, and Other Miscellaneous Prose 1897-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 174

<sup>86</sup> Yeats is writing in relation to time spent with Lady Gregory collecting folklore for her *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920), quoted in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 429 and *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, xiv

influence in remote communities.<sup>87</sup> Studies like Campbell's *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1900) and Alexander Carmichael's epic *Carmina Gadelica*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1900, found commonality with writers like Macleod in asserting the need to defend the ancient ways of the mountain dwellers and islanders against the rationalising and homogenising 'spirit of the age'.<sup>88</sup> One study in particular, *The Fairy-Faith in the Celtic Countries* (1911) by Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, presents a paradigmatic shift in the interpretative framing of folk belief and custom. Despite adhering to the taxonomic models set by other studies, the author—who studied under Lang at Oxford University and went on to produce a popular translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* in 1927—diverged from these in his insistence that 'folkloric cosmologies' depend 'not so much upon ancient traditions, oral and recorded, as upon recent and contemporary psychical experiences, vouched for by many 'seers''.<sup>89</sup> Describing his practice as 'anthropo-psychological', citing Yeats and Lady Gregory as his authorities, and relying upon the evidence of 'reliable seer witnesses', Evans-Wentz presented an ethnographic study of fairy belief sympathetic to the mystical aims of the Celtic Revival. Characterising the 'natural mind of the uncorrupted Celt' as 'ever open to unusual psychical impressions' in contrast to the urban dweller whose mind 'tends to be obsessed with business affairs both during his waking and during his dream states', his chosen methodology intersected with the interests of both the Revival and the SPR in its comparable affirmation of psychical phenomena and extra-sensory experience as worthy subjects of investigation.<sup>90</sup>

To summarise briefly, both Goodrich-Freer and Sharp engaged in forms of participant observation and acts of cultural translation, by which native beliefs—namely the traditions surrounding second sight—were reproduced for a cosmopolitan audience. Writing with regard to the SPR's investigation, Malcolm Chapman proposes that it played to 'Victorian taste for supernatural titillation' which 'did not extend to more than a vague sympathy with the distant Celt, and fond

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<sup>87</sup> See Alexander Carmichael's, *Carmina Gadelica* 6 Vols. (1900-1971), Rev. James McDougall, *Folk Tales and Fairy Lore in Gaelic and English Collected from Oral Tradition*, ed., Rev. George Calder (Edinburgh, 1910) and Rev. John Gregorson Campbell's *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1900) and *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1902)—the data for which was actually collected in the 1860s and published posthumously

<sup>88</sup> Alexander Carmichael's, *Carmina Gadelica* vol. 1 (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1900) p. xxv

<sup>89</sup> W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), (New York: New York University Books, 1966), p. 477

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

imaginings of ‘racial memory’ in London bosoms’.<sup>91</sup> While it was certainly the case that the assertion of essentialist Celticism worked to reproduce a version of Highland identity recognisable to a broadly composed metropolitan audience, this is problematised by the complex subject positions negotiated by both figures. Reflecting on the work of post-colonial theory, Joshua Landy and Michael Saler contend that ‘the seemingly ‘universal’ distinctions championed by the Western metropole between modernity and tradition, or secularism and superstition’ do not hold up ‘when viewed from the periphery’.<sup>92</sup> Though enacted in different ways, Goodrich-Freer and Sharp similarly attempted to cultivate personas that allow them to speak convincingly *from* rather than *to* the ‘periphery’; they produced vividly imagined accounts of the unique and enduring ‘Celtic’ character in order to embody it. In the case of Goodrich-Freer this is made manifest in not only her claims to Scottish ancestry, but also by the series of strategic disavowals through which she sought to disassociate her work from the authority of the SPR. In a letter printed in the *Oban Times*, for instance, she insisted that her findings regarding second sight so far exceed the boundaries of psychical research: ‘Thought transference, sub-conscious activity, subliminal observation, the modern machinery by which the supernormal is in these days reduced to the normal are powerless to transform *our* Highland second-sight to the common-place of science’.<sup>93</sup> Considered in this context, the appropriations and plagiarisms identified by John L. Campbell represented only one element of an intricately realised performance of cultural and linguistic proximity: as Macleod writes, ‘it is so difficult for those of foreign speech and manners and ways of thought and life to reach into the true life of the Gael’.<sup>94</sup>

## 5.2 MYTHS OF NATIONHOOD AND THE RE-MAKING OF THE CELT

Contemporaneous with the ‘Enquiry into Second Sight in the Highlands’ was another cross-disciplinary project that fore-grounded questions of racial heritage and shared histories. The Ethnographic Survey of Great Britain, a collaboration between the Anthropological Institute, the Society of Antiquaries, the Folk-Lore Society and the

<sup>91</sup> Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 132

<sup>92</sup> Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 6

<sup>93</sup> *Oban Times* cited in *Strange Things*, p. 86

<sup>94</sup> Fiona Macleod, ‘The Gael and his Heritage’ in *The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael* (London: William Heinemann, 1913), p. 233

British Association for the Advancement of Science, represented a significant attempt to produce a comprehensive taxonomy of Britain's racial composition. Initiated in 1895, the survey concerned the 'physical types of the inhabitants' their 'current traditions and beliefs', detectable 'peculiarities of dialect', the existence of 'monuments and other remains of ancient culture' and 'historical evidence as to the continuity of race'.<sup>95</sup> In his discussion of this ambitious ethnography, James Urry comments that 'Scotland was an area of intense activity' and reports that by 1897 a folklorist, the Reverend Walter Gregor had been appointed to conduct a survey of Galloway, but that to the 'consternation of many Association members' his final report composed an account of local superstitions, magical cures and popular tales, and contained little in the way of anthropometric data.<sup>96</sup> While it is possible to read this impasse, as Urry does, as the inevitable result of disciplinary miscommunication or incompatibility, it is arguably also a reflection of the pervasive and culturally embedded conflation of a 'Celtic' racial identity with non-rational or folkloric systems of belief. Moreover, this 'failure' to collect adequate data opens up a space in which to consider the strangely symbiotic relation between the narratives of nineteenth-century science and the mystical imperatives of *fin de siècle* literary culture.

Members of the Celtic Revival, though critical of the hyper-formalism implicit in the methodology of investigations like the Ethnographic Survey, similarly worked to produce a recognisable typology of the Celt bound to recorded folk cultures. This found clear expression in the assertion and cultivation of a peculiarly Celtic literary tradition, capable of forging connections not only between Scotland, Ireland and Wales, but Brittany and Cornwall too. In response to his publication of *Lyra Celtica: An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry* (1896), a collection of ancient and modern verse, William Butler Yeats wrote enthusiastically to William Sharp in praise of its potential to forge a 'mutual understanding and sympathy [between] the Scotch, Welsh and Irish Celts'.<sup>97</sup> The establishment of what the Irish writer A.E. (George Russell) termed 'mystic nationalism', between these constitutive nations involved the re-

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<sup>95</sup> *BAAS*, (1895), 509, quoted in James Urry, 'Englishmen, Celts and Iberians: The Ethnographic Survey of the United Kingdom, 1892-1899', in *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology* ed. George Stocking (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 83-105

<sup>96</sup> Urry, p. 94

<sup>97</sup> W.B. Yeats to William Sharp, June 1896 quoted in *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, vol. 11 1896-1900*, eds. Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 36-38. *Lyra Celtica, An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes, 1896) was edited by Elizabeth Sharp and is divided into 13 parts covering Irish, Scots, Welsh, Breton, Cornish and Manx poetry ancient and modern

appropriation of a racialist discourse that subordinated the Celt on charge of irrationality, and the assertion of spiritual authority over the perceived materialism of dominant English culture.<sup>98</sup> Although distinctions must be drawn between the internationalist outlook of ‘The Scots Renaissance’, as championed by Sharp and Patrick Geddes at the Edinburgh-based *Evergreen* journal, and the more politicised nationalism guiding the Irish Literary Revival, both relied upon the notion of a shared heritage spanning geographical and temporal borders.<sup>99</sup> In a discussion of Belgian literature, for example, Sharp drew together the ‘young Belgian’, the ‘Celt of Western Ireland’ and the ‘Scottish Highlander’ through the subjugation of their native tongues: all ‘had either to use the dominant official or literary language, or be content to have no audience, no reader’.<sup>100</sup> While this rhetoric did not always translate into calls for politicised action—Sharp was for the most part critical of nationalist movements—it was geared towards the production of a form of Pan Celticism based upon the reiteration of shared cultural experience and antagonistic to Anglo-Saxon dominance.<sup>101</sup> Formed and ‘revealed to us by history as a ceaseless losing battle’, the power of the ‘doomed and passing’ Celt was located not in the political realm, but rather more obscurely in the rising of ‘his spirit’ in the ‘heart and the brain of the Anglo-Celtic peoples, with whom are the destinies of generations to come’.<sup>102</sup> In this vision of transcendent nationalism, the strength of the race was situated with the maintenance of symbolic meaning and the capacity to invent mythical narratives around the idea of itself.

In this cultural climate, the power of second sight came to serve increasingly as signifier of ‘Celtic’ rather than strictly Scottish genealogy: as a unique racial trait observable among geographically distinct peoples and associated with more broadly imagined visionary powers. So we hear that it was only ‘them that are born at midnight that has the second sight’ from one of Lady Gregory’s West Ireland informants; while the Welsh folklorist Marie Trevelyan claimed second sight as a trait peculiar to South Wales; and we learn that that Yeats’s maternal uncle George

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<sup>98</sup> A.E. or George William Russell (1867-1935) was an Irish nationalist, critic and poet, who shared Yeats’ interest in the theosophy movement and later joined the Order of the Golden Dawn

<sup>99</sup> See Julian Hanna, ‘Manifestos at Dawn: Nation, City and Self in Patrick Geddes and William Sharp’s *Evergreen*’, *International Journal of Scottish Studies* 8 (Autumn/Winter, 2011)

<sup>100</sup> William Sharp, ‘A Note on the Belgian Renaissance’, *Chap-Book*, IV (December, 1895), 149-157 (151)

<sup>101</sup> J. Hunter, ‘The Gaelic Connection: The Highlands, Ireland and Nationalism 1873-1922’ *Scottish Historical Review* 54 (1973) 178-204

<sup>102</sup> Fiona Macleod, ‘Iona’, 701



Pollexfen believed his own housekeeper to be in possession of the gift.<sup>103</sup> This unifying imperative found some consonance in the readings of the phenomenon offered up by the Society for Psychical Research. Walter Leaf, a classical scholar and member of the Society's council who chaired Ada Goodrich-Freer's provisional report to the council in December of 1894, had previously authored an account of second sight in Brittany.<sup>104</sup> This internationalism was echoed in Goodrich-Freer's measured assessment of second sight as 'a common gift of the Celtic Highlander, the prevalent association that does not preclude its existence elsewhere as his brother of the neighbouring island has his share of the faculty'.<sup>105</sup> Implicated in this imagined alliance were theories regarding the movement of early tribes, common language routes, shared myths and folklore, as had been pursued by anthropologists and philologists throughout the nineteenth century. More specifically it also suggested the confluence of a particular mode of life or shared cultural experience with the evolution of extraordinary powers of perception. For though the psychical researcher is willing to concede that the faculty may not be exclusive to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, it remained nonetheless a 'state to live in, not an art to acquire' and 'largely a question of heredity and surroundings'.<sup>106</sup> Second-sightedness then, remained contingent upon a broadly imagined Celtic identity, one that reflected upon the specific material, religious and geographical conditions of that particular racial designation.

In a 1902 article on the work of William B. Yeats and Fiona Macleod, the author proposed that a distinction be drawn between the English writer who 'goes back to the soil' in order to experience something of countryside living, and the 'return of these Celtic writers' who figured nature as 'spiritual in a more overt way'.<sup>107</sup> The projects of both the Celtic Revival and the SPR were invested, to differing ends, in establishing an archetypal Highland identity bound to the local environment and

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<sup>103</sup> Lady Augusta Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (London, 1920), p. 214; Marie Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales* (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 191; see Donald James Gordon, *W.B. Yeats: Images of a Poet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), p. 37

<sup>104</sup> 'The chairman, Dr. Walter Leaf (who is also a member of the Committee of Inquiry into Second Sight), in thanking Miss X for her address and congratulating the Society on the fact that the investigation had fallen into such competent hands, contributed the interesting fact that he was in a position to judge of the difficulties of the inquiry and to estimate Miss X's success in the matter, having himself undertaken a similar task in regard to Second Sight in Brittany', *Borderland 2* (January 1895), 59

<sup>105</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer, 'Saint Columba: The Father of Second Sight' in *Essays in Psychical Research* (London: George Redway, 1899), p. 271

<sup>106</sup> Miss X, 'Second Sight in the Highlands: A Provisional Report', *Borderland 2* (January 1895), 57

<sup>107</sup> 'Fiona Macleod on Mr. W.B. Yeats', *The Academy and Literature* (October 1902), 444-445 (444)

consistent with ancient versions of itself. Strongly identified with wild landscapes and remote corners, the unique spirituality of the Celt was, in a continuation of earlier Romantic iterations of this theme, reliant upon an antediluvian connection to nature. Detached from the materialist preoccupations of the metropolis, the crofter or island fisherman not only lives but *thinks* differently from his urban-dwelling neighbours. For Revivalists the modern Celt thus provided a direct link backwards to ancient and primitive ways of being: as Yeats comments, ‘Men who lived in a world where anything might flow and change, and become any other thing [...] had not our thoughts of weight and measure’.<sup>108</sup> Along similar lines, in a letter to Lord Bute recounting her travels on Tiree, Goodrich-Freer wrote that the ‘gift’ appears to be found in people of a ‘distinctly religious, meditative cast of mind, —men mainly who live out of doors, and are much alone, who take broad, simple views of life, self-communing, lovers of nature, little regardful of small commonplaces’.<sup>109</sup> The dominant features of the ‘modern’—urbanisation, mechanisation, and rationality—remained situated in opposition to the ‘natural’ values of ‘the uncontaminated Gael’.<sup>110</sup>

Recalling the anthropological theorist Johannes Fabian’s characterisation of the anthropological project as contingent upon the maintenance of a distance produced by, ‘manipulating temporal coexistence through the denial of coevalness’, it is clear that this interpretation of Gaelic culture was similarly invested in situating it as somehow out of time with the ‘ethnographic present’.<sup>111</sup> However, in opposition to the stadial consciousness usually associated with this temporal model, in which the illiterate or superstitious ‘primitive’ serves as an exemplar of an earlier developmental phase, the return of *fin de siècle* writers to Celtic themes was predicated on the assumption that this apparently ancient people were in many ways more ‘advanced’ than their compatriots at the metropole. In an article for the *Contemporary Review*, for instance, Macleod described the modern ‘Celt’ as ‘the offspring of a race who were in a more close communion with the secret powers of the world that we know and the secret powers of the world we do not know, than were any other people’ and who

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<sup>108</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Essays: Ideas of Good and Evil* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 219

<sup>109</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer to Lord Bute 8 August 1894, quoted in *Strange Things*, p. 44

<sup>110</sup> ‘Second Sight in the Highlands: The Second Report of Miss X’, *Borderland* 3 (January 1897), 56-61 (61)

<sup>111</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 121

‘stood more near to ancient forgotten founts of wisdom than others stood’.<sup>112</sup> This was underpinned by a familiar bifurcation of oral and literate cultures, wherein the former is imagined as in some way incompatible with the strictures of the latter. As Penny Fielding suggests, this division became ‘particularly marked in the nineteenth century, when some traditional foes of orality—urbanization, manufacturing, technology, science—dominated that country’s sense of its own value systems’, and that as such orality was increasingly, ‘located elsewhere than in the temporal centre’.<sup>113</sup> Part of the project of the Celtic Revival involved not only a recuperation of oral strategies of culture transmission, but also an attempt to rediscover the cognitive spaces opened up by orality, ways of thinking and visualising shut off to the literate. In the ‘Gael and His Heritage’ for instance, Macleod understood this as a linguistic division between English and Gaelic, and proposed that ‘When a people is forced by circumstances to speak in two tongues the native speech naturally remains that of the inward life, the inward remembrance, the spirit’.<sup>114</sup> Along similar lines, Goodrich-Freer, in a discussion of modern day second sight, described the average Highlanders as being ‘by temperament and habit a visualiser: his tales are told in a series of pictures’, and identified this as a contributing factor to the phenomenon’s prevalence.<sup>115</sup> The purported visionary capacity of the Celt was thus conceived of as not only the result of hereditary and geographical remoteness, but also as a protest against the imposition of exterior values on traditional societies and an assertion of pre-modern knowledge.

Prominent in much of the literature associated with the late-Victorian Celtic Revival was an elegising of ancient culture on the brink of extinction. This is, of course, part of the Gael’s charm, and Sharp was particularly invested in the romantic image of an ‘ancient race, standing for the last beautiful, mysterious world’ rapidly ‘fading through its dim twilight’, but it was also a source of frustration and anxiety.<sup>116</sup> As Castle has outlined it was a ‘nostalgia for tradition, for an authentic peasantry characterized by spiritualism’ that led Revivalists to adopt ‘a form of redemptive ethnography that strove to salvage ‘lost’ or ‘vanishing’ cultures’.<sup>117</sup> Writing as

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<sup>112</sup> Fiona Macleod, ‘Celtic’ *Contemporary Review* (May 1900), 669-679 (669)

<sup>113</sup> Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 4

<sup>114</sup> Fiona Macleod, ‘The Gael and his Heritage’, *The Nineteenth Century* (November 1890), 825-841 (827)

<sup>115</sup> ‘Saint Columba: The Father of Second Sight’, p. 300

<sup>116</sup> ‘The Gael and his Heritage’, 826

<sup>117</sup> Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, p. 41

Macleod, Sharp conceived of this threatened dissolution as a process of colonisation: it 'is a bitter, cruel thing that strangers must rule the hearts and brains, as well as the poor fortunes, of the mountaineers and the islanders'.<sup>118</sup> As we have witnessed in previous chapters, this narrative of decline was a condition of both the institutionalised practices of folklore collection, and also of the second-sight tradition itself, which has threatened to disappear from the gaze of the scientist, antiquarian and poet from at the least the seventeenth century.<sup>119</sup> Falling in with this familiar reading, Macleod goes on to lament that 'second sight' is today 'more common in the Western Isles than in the Highlands', where 'all things sacred to the Celtic race' are now 'smiled at by the gentle and mocked by the vulgar'.<sup>120</sup> The SPR's inquiry was underwritten by a similar sense of urgency and an awareness of the troubling rapid encroachment of the modern world, though this was not accompanied by recognition of their part in this advance. Given that the investigation was instituted and funded by a prominent advocate of Home Rule for Scotland, Lord Bute, it is arguable that psychical research's unexpected foray into peasant lore arose from the same cultural conditions as the Celtic Revival. This is not to suggest that members of the SPR were in any way sympathetic to the nationalist agenda, but rather that the inquiry into second sight spoke to some of the de-politicised elements of that movement.

During a discussion at Westminster Town Hall on 5 December 1895, a prominent member of the society, the spiritualist and evolutionist Alfred Russell Wallace, reported that having conducted his own tour of Iona and enquired into the topic, he was informed by a local there that the investigation was likely to succeed, as 'they were as good liars in that island as in any other'.<sup>121</sup> The reply proffered by 'Miss X' is telling: rather than simply refute the implication that her evidence base might be unsound, she adroitly shifted the focus of the accusation and avowed that 'owing to their contamination by English and Lowland tourists, they were probably better [liars] than in any other!'.<sup>122</sup> If the naturally moral, honest and 'uncontaminated' Highlander has fallen into distributable habits then this is absolutely the result, Miss X assured her listeners, of damaging outside influences. In a study of Hebridean folklore published after her break with the SPR, she went on to compare the damage wrought

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<sup>118</sup> Fiona Macleod, *The Dominion of Dreams* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1899), p. 56

<sup>119</sup> Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1978), p. 123

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>121</sup> *JSPR* 7 (January 1892), 186

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*.

by English visitors on the traditions of these remote isles as akin to those enacted upon the 'decaying races of North American' and the 'gin sodden-tribes of Western Africa'.<sup>123</sup> In laying claim to Scottish genealogy and Highland ancestry, Goodrich-Freer sought to distance her observational position from that occupied by the coloniser, claiming proximity rather than distance. Similarly, as is suggested by Yeats's praise of Macleod as a writer in possession of 'the keys of those gates of the primeval world, which shut behind more successful races, when they plunged into material progress', the pre-literate visionary life of the Celt was constructed as one not only observable but accessible to modern writers of certain pedigree.<sup>124</sup>

In Macleod's symbolically rich mystical fictions, the reader is indulged with a vision of Highland life out of time with the modernising imperatives of the metropolis. Short story collections such as *The Sin-Eater* (1895) and *The Gypsy Christ* (1895), and novels like *The Mountain Lovers* (1895) and *The Washer of the Ford* (1896) reworked Gaelic myth to create fictional worlds devoid of temporal indicators, in which folkloric metaphysics determined experiential reality. In turn, the writer's own creative practice was constructed as in some way contingent on the natural environment and conversely, as sullied by any interaction with the urban. This is partly a reflection of Sharp's own antipathy to cities and partly a strategic manoeuvre that allowed him to excuse Macleod from London literary events. In a letter confessing his secret literary identity the two were conflated: his inability to 'do my true work in this accursed London' is the result of his Celtic heritage 'by blood I am part Celt, and partly so by upbringing, by Spirit wholly so', and this has resulted in the necessary formation of literary double capable of operating outside of the city.<sup>125</sup> There is, of course, another form of doubling at stake in the creation of 'Fiona Macleod', yet this re-gendering also resonates a dominant reading of Celtic culture. In a letter to Yeats, written under the guise of his pseudonym, Sharp gave an account of his split identity under the guise of a fable concerning a man 'of Celtic ancestry on one side and Norse on the other' whose spirit merges with that of the woman he loves, 'a Celt of the Celts'.<sup>126</sup> As Sharp recounted, 'He was the genius, the ancestral

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<sup>123</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer, *Outer-Isles* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1902) p. 319

<sup>124</sup> Yeats, 'Miss Fiona Macleod', *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, eds. John P. Fratne and Colton Johnson, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1975)

<sup>125</sup> William Sharp to Catherine Janvier, Sep. 1894, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), pp. 226-

<sup>126</sup> Fiona Macleod to W.B. Yeats, 28 June 1898, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, vol. 11 1896-1900*, eds. Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 241

memory, the creative power—*she* was the flame—she too, being also visionary, and with unusual and all but lost wisdom of the Gael'.<sup>127</sup> In *The Celtic Twilight* Yeats made this dynamic clear when he states that, 'women come more easily than men to that wisdom which ancient peoples, and all wild peoples even now, think the only wisdom'.<sup>128</sup> This authorial identity should be read then, as a negotiation of psychological and public needs: means of assuaging the feminine aspects of his own character, but also as way of accessing the primitivist and nativistic gestures at play in the spiritualised Celticism of the *fin de siècle*.

In their attempt to identify, preserve and utilise the aesthetic legacy of the Celt, turn-of-the-century writers and artists were compelled to engage with a related inheritance: namely the cultural authority of Ernest Renan's *Poetry of the Celtic Races* (1859) and Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). These studies, which staged a reading of national literatures through the prism of racialist typologies and nascent ethnological discourse, remained a primary point of contact for those interested in Celtic folklore, history or art in the late nineteenth century. Particularly durable was the 'Celtic Darwinism' pursued by these writers, which posited the poetic sensibility of the Celt as the cause, justification and consolation for his political submission to the rationally minded and able-bodied Anglo Saxon.<sup>129</sup> At first glance the Arnoldian stereotype of the 'feminine', 'nervous' and naturally 'spiritual' Celt appears to have been enthusiastically resurrected by Revivalist thinking: Macleod's assertion that the 'Celtic writer is the writer the temper of whose mind is more ancient, more primitive, and in a sense more natural than that of his compatriot in who the Teutonic strain prevails', certainly dealt in a similarly dichotomous and comparably problematic reading of 'race'.<sup>130</sup> Yet as historians like David Cairns and Shaun Richards have argued, this legacy sat uncomfortably with the political imperatives underpinning the Celtic Twilight, formed to challenge rather than collude in the subordination of marginalised peoples within the 'Imperial community'.<sup>131</sup> While Arnold—recognising in English culture the same 'Philistinism' that Sharp would go on to characterise as 'an atmosphere of deadening, crushing, paralyzing,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893) p. 114

<sup>129</sup> Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 71

<sup>130</sup> Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867), p. 73 and Fiona Macleod, 'A Group of Celtic Writers', *Fortnightly Review* 65 (January 1899), 36

<sup>131</sup> David Cairns and Shaun Richards, 'Reading a Riot: The 'Reading Formation' of Synge's Abby Audience', *Literature and History* 12.2 (Autumn 1987), 219-37 (222)

death-in-life respectability’—recommended the ‘wisely directed’ absorption of the Celtic ‘element’ into British culture, this new generation of writers envisioned the complete transformation of that culture along radically new lines.<sup>132</sup>

‘I cannot get it out of my mind’, Yeats confessed in an 1899 essay, ‘that this age of criticism is about to pass, and an age of imagination, of emotion, of moods of revelation about to come in its place, for certainly belief in the supersensual world is at hand again’.<sup>133</sup> The agent of this renewal and re-orientation, primed to carry European culture into a new century and a new age, was the visionary imagination of its peripheral peoples. Whilst Sharp did not identify with the more explicitly nationalist aspects of this project, he was similarly invested in the exploration and propagation of an essential *geist*.<sup>134</sup> Writing to the American journalist Horace Scudder on the proposed publication of *Lyra Celtica*, for example, he explained that his interest lay not with ‘what is written in Scottish Gaelic or Irish Gaelic’ but with uncovering a ‘Celtic *spirit*’.<sup>135</sup> Leaving this problematic negation of national literature aside for the moment, what is also being staked out here is a movement away from the question of race or biological hereditary, towards a kind of eternal essence or mode of being, theoretically accessible to all. What is now only visible in remnants of fairytales and folklore was at one time what ‘every people in the world believed’.<sup>136</sup> Thus, though the theoretical elaboration of this Celtic ‘element’ could provide a means of articulating nationalist political positions, it was never confined to set of geographical coordinates; rather, writers at the *fin de siècle* reiterated the wisdom of the Celt as a *universally* regenerative force. The first issue of *Evergreen*, the journal founded by Sharp and the Edinburgh-publisher Patrick Geddes, begins with a manifesto for national rejuvenation: ‘Such is our Scottish, our Celtic Renaissance—sadly set betwixt the Keening, the watching over our fathers dead, and the second-sight shroud rising about each other. Yet this is the Resurrection and the Life, when to faithful love and memory their dead arise’.<sup>137</sup> The opening gambit of the *Pagan Review*, a single-issue

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<sup>132</sup> *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, p. x and William Sharp quoted in Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir* (London: Heinemann, 1901), p. 1

<sup>133</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrucx’ in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London: A.H. Bullen, 1907), pp. 308-311 (310)

<sup>134</sup> Sondeep Kandola, ‘Celtic Occultism and the Symbolist Mode in the Fin-de-Siècle Writing of Arthur Machen and W.B. Yeats’, *English Literature in Transition* 56.4 (2013), 497-518

<sup>135</sup> William Sharp to Horace Scudder January 2 1895 ALS Harvard Houghton

<sup>136</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘The Celtic Element in Literature’ (1898) reproduced in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats IV: Early Essays* eds. Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), pp. 128-138 (129)

<sup>137</sup> Patrick Geddes, ‘The Scots Renaissance’, *Evergreen* 1 (Spring 1895), 131-39 (139)

journal written by Sharp under a number of different authorial guises, conveyed a similarly revolutionary tone: ‘The new paganism is a potent leaven in the yeast of the ‘younger generation’ [...] The new epoch is about to be inaugurated, is, indeed, in many respects, already begun’.<sup>138</sup> Attendant on this accumulative rhetoric of rebirth, renaissance and resurrection, is the image of a newly empowered Celt, drawn from folklore and myth, yet capable of enacting change in the present.

### 5.3 THE OCCULT CELT

On the 3 May 1898 William Butler Yeats wrote to William Sharp from Paris to tell him of a strange incident that had occurred the previous evening, and to request that he pass on an enclosed letter to Fiona Macleod as soon as possible. While undertaking shared magical rites with his hosts, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and Moina Mathers, Yeats had encountered the ‘astral form’ of a man dressed in a number of clan tartans. In the sealed correspondence more details were given: he described how he was suddenly ‘visited by the intellectual body of some one who was passing through an intense emotional crisis’ and having confessed that he was ‘inclined to believe’ that Macleod was the spectral visitor he queried, ‘Were you, either last night or Sunday night (the intellectual body sometimes appears a little after the emotional crisis that causes its appearance) passing through some state of tragic feeling?’<sup>139</sup> Writing two days later, the Irish poet advised Sharp that, though he felt bound ‘by an oath of adeptship’ not to pry into Macleod’s affairs he must warn him not to undertake any ‘magical work with Miss Macleod until we meet’ as ‘you are both the channells [sic] of some very powerful beings and some mistake has been made’.<sup>140</sup> From the perspective of this thesis, now in its final chapter, the content of these letters appears at once familiar and deeply alien. While the sudden materialisation of an apparition—even one of a living friend—has been rendered almost proverbial by the vast data collated by *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), here it appears that this ghostly emanation been raised through mysterious incantations, in the process of which the spirit has changed its gender. Moreover, though the spiritualist movement provides a precedent for the idea that the living can act as

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<sup>138</sup> *The Pagan Review*, (August 15 1892), 1-4

<sup>139</sup> W.B. Yeats to William Sharp/Fiona Macleod 3 May 1898, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, vol. 11 1896-1900*, eds. Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1997), p. 220

<sup>140</sup> W.B. Yeats to William Sharp 7 May 1898, *Collected Letters*, pp. 222-23



channels for the dead, it offers nothing to parallel the mysterious ‘powerful beings’ encountered by the poet or the assumption of control implied by his apology that a ‘mistake’ has occurred. Finally, having thus far encountered these figures championing Celtic literature, collecting rural folklore and pursuing cultural transformations in turn-of-the-century Britain, how can we begin to square these public-facing activities with dangerous ‘magical rites’ undertaken in secret and discussed in sealed letters?

In *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1949), Richard Ellmann understands the poet’s dedication to Celticism, nationalism, modernism and occultism as an expression of a ‘doubling or splitting of the self’.<sup>141</sup> As more recent scholarship has attended to, though this compartmentalisation offers a way into thinking through the poet’s seemingly incommensurate interests, it ultimately fails to reflect the complex network of interdependencies and interconnections that linked these areas of activity.<sup>142</sup> Instead historians have argued that the occult revival and nascent modernism must be understood as part of the same historical movement: Alex Owen argues that not only did late-Victorian occultists ‘self-consciously’ refer to themselves as modern, this new ‘occultism was itself a mode of experiencing the new’.<sup>143</sup> While ‘Modernity’ has typically been read as synecdoche for rationalism and disenchantment, the equivalence drawn by Owen suggests the ways in which ‘the search for spiritual meaning can renew itself and adapt to the changing climate of secularizing culture’.<sup>144</sup> In seeking out a means to articulate the modern, the *fin de siècle* glanced backwards: Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society espoused the wisdom of the East, while periodicals like *Lucifer*, *The Quest* and *The Occult Review* explored ancient hermetic practices and encouraged their readers to look to the pre-modern world for guidance. In literature this search for alternative routes to spiritual and self-knowledge can be observed at multiple sites: from the Decadent quarterly *Yellow Book* to the high modernist aesthetics of poets like H.D. and Ezra Pound, from the dark folkloric symbolism pursued by writers like Arthur Machen to the dreamy metaphysical romances of popular novelists like Marie Corelli and Theodore Watts-

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<sup>141</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1949), (London: Faber, 1973), p. 77

<sup>142</sup> See Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999)

<sup>143</sup> Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 9. Also see Leon Surette and Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos eds., *Literary Modernism and the Occult Tradition* (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1996)

<sup>144</sup> Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 11. See also Michael Saler, ‘Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes’: Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940’, *The Historical Journal* 46.3 (September 2003), 599-622

Dunton.<sup>145</sup> This multifarious occultism spanned categories of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, instituting a new mode of popular engagement with the spiritual, the magical and the supernatural.

Importantly, this revived interest in mystical religion, ancient myth and esoteric tradition also prompted turn-of-the-century writers to begin asking questions of native peasant customs, folk tales and supernatural lore, quite different from those pursued by the Folklore Society. Binding elements of the Celtic Twilight to late-Victorian occultism was a reinterpretation of ‘folk metaphysics’, which transformed myth from a literary convention to a form of experiential reality.<sup>146</sup> In *The Fairy-Faith in the Celtic Countries* (1911), Evans-Wentz delineated an approach to folklore sympathetic to this agenda. He wrote that, ‘Fairyland, stripped of all its literary and imaginative glamour’ eventually ‘resolves itself into a reality, because it is one of the states of consciousness co-ordinate with the ordinary consciousness’.<sup>147</sup> Recalling something of the thesis pursued by Robert Kirk’s *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691), in which a ‘subterranean’ world exists in parallel to our own, Evans-Wentz sketched out a place for fairies in ‘conscious’ reality.<sup>148</sup> Discussing Yeats’s problematic relationship with the legacy of Matthew Arnold, Castle explains that for the former ‘the other-worldly is simultaneously *this*-worldly’ or rather, the magical practices that for Arnold represented simply expression of the ‘eccentricity of the Celtic imagination’ were ‘for Yeats *real*’.<sup>149</sup> Thus the new impetus to recover and preserve the traditions of Europe’s marginalised communities stemmed from the assumption that these were rooted in a kind of magical reality accessible to the spiritually-minded observer.

In an essay on the visionary philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg, Yeats praised the eighteenth-century mystic for having recognised that this ‘earth-resembling life is the creation of the image-making power of the mind, plucked naked

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<sup>145</sup>See Catherine Maxwell, ‘Theodore Watts-Dunton’s *Aylwin* (1898) and the Reduplications of Romanticism’, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37.1 (2007) 1-21

<sup>146</sup> In *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), Jason Marc Harris defines ‘folk metaphysics’ as concerned ‘folkloric assumptions about how the supernatural engages in the material world’ (viii)

<sup>147</sup> Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, p. 469

<sup>148</sup> Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth, An Essay on the Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and for the Most Part) Invisible People, Heretofore Going Under the Name of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* [1691], with comment by Andrew Lang and an introduction by R.B. Cunninghame Graham (Enemas MacKay: Stirling, 1893), p. 64 and 60

<sup>149</sup>Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, p. 58

from the body, and mainly of the images in the memory'.<sup>150</sup> Forced to reflect upon a late-Victorian context this is both a powerful articulation of the symbolist mode in literature and a blueprint for magical explorations based on the assumption that the products of the imagination are more real than 'reality'.<sup>151</sup> The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was at its core an espousal of exactly this principle: imagination is both the 'Formative Power' that generates the universe and the 'Creative Faculty' that manipulates it.<sup>152</sup> Structured around a hierarchy of three orders, which schooled adepts in a series of clairvoyant techniques: 'Skrying', 'Travelling' and 'Rising' in the 'Spirit Vision', initiates pursued a curriculum of magical expertise that granted ever deeper access into the mysteries of the unseen world. This was underpinned by a number of magical texts, decoded by co-founder William Wynn Westcott, and containing within them the rituals and graduated teachings that the movement would adopt.<sup>153</sup> At stake in complex ceremonies performed by the Order was the belief that revelations concerning the potentials of the unconscious, non-human realms and alternative realities could be obtained through the careful study of lost texts and magical symbols. Though undertaken in secret and among a select group of individuals, these esoteric explorations did not take place within a vacuum. Rather, initiates brought to the study of supposedly ancient texts a broad range of contemporary political, cultural and artistic imperatives.<sup>154</sup> While there is not the space here to give a full account of the Golden Dawn's complicated history or to mount a detailed interpretation of its peculiar blend of Renaissance magic, Neoplatonism and Rosicrucianism, it remains important to understand the transformations enacted on Scottish second sight by this new occultism.

Thinking once more of Yeats's sealed letter to Macleod, it is significant that though the poet wrote in this instance under the assumption that his two

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<sup>150</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'Swedenborg, Mediums and Desolate Places' in Lady Augusta Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 317-36 (320)

<sup>151</sup> See Kathleen Raine, 'Hades Wrapped in Cloud' in *Yeats and the Occult* ed. George Mills Harper (Canada: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1975) pp. 80-107

<sup>152</sup> V.H. Fra. Resurgam [Dr. Berridge], Flying Roll No. 5 quoted in Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 151

<sup>153</sup> See Joscelyn Godwin's *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (New York: SUNY, 1994) for an account of the controversy surrounding the true source of the cipher manuscripts. William Wynn Westcott claimed to have received them through the Rev. A. F. A. Woodford from the estate of Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie, a Masonic scholar, and to have decoded them with the help of an aging adept named Anna Sprengel. The authenticity of the manuscripts has been challenged on multiple fronts, as Godwin has it, 'No Golden Dawn scholar believes Westcott's story' and it has been suggested that instead the documents were created by Mackenzie in the early nineteenth century (223)

<sup>154</sup> Kathleen Raine, *Yeats: The Tarot and the Golden Dawn* (London: The Doleman Press, 1972) and R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (London: Quantum, 1997)

correspondents were distinct individuals, the discovery that this was not the case did not completely alter how he envisioned the connection between the two. In a letter to Maud Gonne on learning the truth he described Macleod as representing, ‘a kind of semi-allegorical description of the adventures of [Sharp’s] own secondary personality and its relation with the primary self’ and recounted that this ‘secondary personality when it awoke in him’ wrote in ‘a much more impassioned way’.<sup>155</sup> Here Richard Ellmann’s description of the Celtic Revivalist’s as characterised by ‘duality’ takes on new meaning: Macleod, like George Russell’s ‘A.E.’, was not simply a literary persona, but an *anima* personality uncovered through the techniques of advanced ritual magic and capable of transacting occluded realities existing outside of the individual unconscious. Having been initiated into the ‘Neophyte’ grade of London’s Isis Urania Temple, Sharp joined with Yeats, George Pollexfen, Maud Gonne, Florence Farr and the Mathers, in lengthy astral explorations of specifically Gaelic myths and legendary figures. Undertaken with the aim of establishing a ‘Celtic Order of Mysteries’ within the Golden Dawn, between 1897 and 1898 efforts were made to synthesise a reading of Celtic folk stories and sagas with the esoteric precepts of practical magic. The new sect was to be based in a ruined castle at Lough Key in Roscommon, the ‘Castle of Celtic Heroes’, which Yeats envisioned as ‘a place where its members could retire for a while for contemplation’ and where they might begin to explore a philosophy that found ‘its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature’.<sup>156</sup> Aside from its Celtic exclusivity, the group distinguished itself from others within the Golden Dawn by its use of talisman and tarot to uncover ‘ancestral memory’: as Owen notes, while the ‘assumption that the proper use of carefully selected symbols could facilitate entry into a non-personal astral realm was familiar enough to Adepts’ the ‘idea of moving beyond the personal and into ancestral memory’ was not.<sup>157</sup> Within the Order this ‘great memory’, which could be evoked by the use of carefully chosen symbols, served as a kind of esoteric mirror for the political and cultural goals of the Celtic Revival.<sup>158</sup>

Reflecting upon this period and his ‘vain attempt to find a philosophy and to create a ritual’ for the Celtic Order, Yeats described his desire to ‘set before Irishmen’

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<sup>155</sup> W.B. Yeats to Maud Gonne January 14 1907, *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893-1938: Always Your Friend*, ed. Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares (London: Hutchinson, 1992), pp. 234-235

<sup>156</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘Ireland After Parnell’ in *Autobiographies* [1922] (London: Macmillan & Co. 1955), p. 204

<sup>157</sup> *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 168

<sup>158</sup> Robert Fitzroy Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 196-6

an ‘Irish literature’ which ‘though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind’.<sup>159</sup> In addition to demonstrating how the ‘great memory’ might have found expression outside of occult circles, this remembrance also underlined the prominence of the Irish Celt in this history. Made clear when Maud Gonne left the Golden Dawn on grounds that its Masonic basis allied it to English institutional power, mystical adeptship was frequently bound to the nationalist cause, the Home Rule movement and to the questions raised by a tumultuous political climate.<sup>160</sup> In contrast to the politicised nature of the Irish contingency, the Golden Dawn’s Scottish presence does not appear to have aligned itself to an explicitly nationalist or even broadly political agenda. Sharp’s description of the Pan-Celtic Revival as ‘fundamentally the outcome of Ossian, and immediately the rising of the sap in the Irish nation’ was telling.<sup>161</sup> Where Ireland contributed the revolutionary social context of the present, Scotland’s role in the movement was bound to ‘Ossian’: James Macpherson’s third-century Gaelic bard, whose melancholic poems were published in the mid-eighteenth century amidst a storm of controversy surrounding their dubious origins.<sup>162</sup> The accusation levelled by Andrew Lang, that ‘Neo-Celts’ were ‘pertinaciously bent on being ‘Ossianic’’, had by the late nineteenth century accrued significant cultural meaning. It communicated a fake, kitsch, ineffective and overly romanticised vision of Scottish history, or as Lang had it: ‘vagueness, mistiness, obscurity’.<sup>163</sup> It was certainly not the case that Irish occultists embodied some ‘authentic’ Celtic identity inaccessible to their Scottish counterparts: as Richard Fallis has highlighted, ‘neither Yeats nor Douglas Hyde nor A.E. was a Celt by birth, but for all three the notion of Celticism became a fundamental way of defining Irishness’.<sup>164</sup> Yet it is arguable that expressions of ‘Highland’ identity within the Golden Dawn were realised through a set of theatrical tropes, largely unmatched in Welsh and Irish examples.

Though ‘Fiona Macleod’ remained the only example of a fully realised alternate personality, in many respects the most prominent iterations of Scottish

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<sup>159</sup> ‘Ireland After Parnell’, p. 204

<sup>160</sup> See Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1996)

<sup>161</sup> William Sharp quoted in Elizabeth A. Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), p. 256

<sup>162</sup> See Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen, *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

<sup>163</sup> Andrew Lang, ‘Green Fire’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (Feb. 1897), 189-190 (189)

<sup>164</sup> Richard Fallis, *The Irish Renaissance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1977), p. 60

identity within the Order mirrored this theatricalised Gael. Recalling his stay with Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers in Paris, for example, Yeats described how in the evenings his host would wear ‘Highland dress and dance the sword dance’ while ‘his mind brooded upon the ramifications of clans and tartans’.<sup>165</sup> Detecting something inauthentic in this ostentatious display of nomenclature, Yeats hazarded that in truth his friend may not have ‘seen the Highlands’ or even ‘Scotland itself’.<sup>166</sup> Born in Hackney North London to a working class family, Mathers’s Scottish ancestry was indeed formed ‘under the touch of the Celtic Movement’.<sup>167</sup> Adopting the title of Comte de Glenstrae, which he dated from the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, his fabricated aristocratic heritage belied dictatorial tendencies that would eventually precipitate a split in the Order at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>168</sup> Though his increasingly despotic rule and paranoid scheming contributed greatly to the splintering of the movement, his growing friendship with and eventual patronage of another ‘ancestral’ Scot, the notorious Aleister Crowley, did little to soothe tensions.<sup>169</sup> Having been denied initiation into Adeptus Minor grade, Crowley had applied directly to Mathers, who duly overrode the decision and conducted the ceremony in secret. On discovering that moves were being made to expel him from the Order in light of this betrayal, he dispatched his new initiate to steal papers from the London temple; a duty that Crowley undertook bedecked in full tartan regalia. Putting to one side the somewhat absurd image of a kilted robber roaming the streets of Hammersmith, there is a notable intersection between this enactment of a romanticised Highland identity and what Alison Butler has described as the ‘invented traditions’—the synthetic processes, repetitions and historical continuities—of late-nineteenth-century occultism.<sup>170</sup> In one of its original critical iterations, the idea of an ‘invented tradition’ was taken up in an essay by the historian Hugh Trevor-Roper to describe the retrospective fabrication of an ancient and distinctive Highland culture in the second half of the eighteenth century, a process that is arguably reiterated by the

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<sup>165</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats* Vol. III, eds. William H. O’Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 257

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘Magic’ *Monthly Review* (September 1901), 144-164 (153)

<sup>168</sup> R.A. Gilbert, ‘Mathers, Samuel Liddell (1853-1918)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

<sup>169</sup> See Tobias Churton, ‘Revolt in the Golden Dawn 1899-1900’, *Aleister Crowley: the Biography: A Spiritual Revolutionary, Romantic Explorer, Occult Master and Spy* (London: Watkins, 2011)

<sup>170</sup> Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 173-174

theatrical playing out of established ‘Celtic’ tropes—clan tartans, Jacobitism, Ossianism, Catholicism—within the Golden Dawn.<sup>171</sup>

Though it would be easy to follow Lang in dismissing these figures as somewhat preposterous Celtic pretenders, this would involve discounting not only the absolute seriousness with which these Gaelic identities were taken on, but also the important ways these personas reshaped the second-sight tradition at the turn of the century. The intersection of the Celtic Revival with the elite magical practice of the Golden Dawn, in terms of common members and shared aspirations, impacted greatly upon the narrative components of this pre-visionary faculty. In an essay on ‘The Later Work of Mr. Yeats’ in 1902, Macleod began by praising her friend as the ‘priest of the symbolic’ alike to all history’s great poets, who ‘see and dream in a reality so vivid that it is called imagination’. Thus, she continued ‘he lives with symbols, as unimaginative natures live with facts’ and with him ‘the imagination is in truth the *second-sight* of the mind’.<sup>172</sup> Written into symbolist poetics, second sight becomes exemplary of what Sharp described as the tendency of the Celt to see ‘the thing beyond the thing’ or to understand the everyday world as façade.<sup>173</sup> In a recent article Sinéad G. Matter has argued for a greater critical engagement with Yeats’s re-appropriation of ‘animism’, which wrestled the concept from the grips of a ‘post-Enlightenment, anthropocentric insistence on the primary ‘materialism’ of the cosmos’ and forced it instead to reflect upon an ‘indigenous ontology of animating spirits’ in possession of ‘intrinsic, radically anti-anthropocentric power’.<sup>174</sup> It is possible to conceive of the reshaping of second sight as composing one element of this project, whereby the visionary power became an active force in shaping reality rather than only an object of folkloric or anthropological curiosity.

The animistic universe, wherein imagination is reality and creation is shaped by universal correspondences, undergirds the remote and insular worlds inhabited by Macleod’s characters. In ‘The Sin Eater’ Neil Ross attempts to enact a posthumous

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<sup>171</sup>Hugh Trevor Roper, ‘The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland’ in *The Invention of Tradition* eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 15

<sup>172</sup>Fiona Macleod, ‘The Later Work of Mr. Yeats’, *North American Review* (October 1902), 473-485 (476)

<sup>173</sup>William Sharp quoted in Flavia Alaya, *William Sharp—Fiona Macleod: 1855-1905* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 181

<sup>174</sup>Sinéad G. Matter, ‘Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism’, *New Literary History* 43.1 (Winter 2012), 137-157 (138, 152). Matter mounts this reading in light of as Bruno Latour’s recent suggestion that ‘there is no way to devise a successor to nature, if we do not tackle the question of animism anew’ (138)

revenge on a dead enemy by exploiting structures of supernatural causation—taking on the role of sin eater, reserved for strangers, by disguising his true identity—but finds himself doomed by metaphysical systems outside of his control; in ‘Fara-Ghaol’ an island woman, against the Catholicism she practices, is consumed by the belief that her child has been replaced by a changeling; and in ‘The Judgment o’ God’ a man isolated from his island community becomes dangerously obsessed with a selky or seal woman.<sup>175</sup> As Jason M. Harris has observed, the characters of these narratives ‘think and breathe, not within the sublime air of romantic notions of folk culture, but a mist blown by metamorphosing cultures’.<sup>176</sup> Read in light of one of the Golden Dawn’s central tenets, the belief in the ‘supremacy of the imagination’, the supernatural metaphysics of these tales similarly allowed the second-sighted to actively produce reality: the vision of the seer represented the ‘symbolic imagination at work’ and an ‘effort of the soul to create in symbolic vision a concept of spiritual insight such as the mind cannot adequately realise’.<sup>177</sup>

Reflecting upon his folklore collecting trips through Ireland with Lady Gregory, Yeats wrote that having ‘noticed many analogies in modern spirits’ he began ‘going a good deal to séances’ but that he ‘did not go there for evidence of the kind the Society for Psychical Research would value’, and sought rather to ‘make Holloway interpret Aran’.<sup>178</sup> His interest in the séance, like his fascination with the peasant culture of remote corners, was not one predicated on the possibility of uncovering empirical evidence for the survival of the soul, but rather ‘like Paracelsus, who claimed to have collected his knowledge from midwife and hangman, [he] was discovering a philosophy’.<sup>179</sup> Despite this rather snobbish dismissal from a former member of the SPR, there existed significant crossovers between the models of self being elaborated by psychical research and those being unearthed by occultists. Frederic Myers’s theory of the ‘subliminal self’ as a region of consciousness capable of embracing ‘a far wider range both of physiological and of psychical activity than is

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<sup>175</sup> Fiona Macleod, ‘The Sin-Eater’ in *The Sin-Eater, The Washer of the Ford, and Other Legendary Moralities* (London: Heinemann, 1912), 25-26, ‘Fara-Ghaol’ in *The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael* (London: Heinemann, 1913) and ‘The Judgment of God’ in *The Dominion of Dreams and Under the Dark Star* (1895), (New York: Duffield, 1910) 55-78

<sup>176</sup> Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, p. 180

<sup>177</sup> Yeats, ‘Magic’ in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London: A.H. Bullen, 1903), pp. 29-69 and Fiona Macleod ‘Maya’ in *The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael* (London: Heinemann, 1913), pp. 153-163 (159)

<sup>178</sup> Yeats, ‘Swedenborg’, 311

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. See Arnold Goldman, ‘Yeats, Spiritualism and Psychical Research’ in *Yeats and the Occult* ed. George Mills Harper (Canada: Macmillan of Canada, 1975) pp. 108-129



open to our supraliminal consciousness, to our supraliminal memory' concurred closely with the transcendently expansive vision of the unconscious pursued by the Golden Dawn's adepts.<sup>180</sup> Further comparisons can be drawn over the importance of the imagination, mythmaking and dreaming to both parties. Macleod's description, for instance, of dreams and visions as the 'curlews of the imagination that go crying through the waste places of the mind', could easily be read as akin to the 'flashes' of genius and 'fugitive bright lines referable to our subliminal strata' elucidated in 'The Subliminal Consciousness'.<sup>181</sup> Similarly invested in the explication of the 'supernormal' and in exploring the boundary regions of the self, occultism and psychological research shared self-knowledge as a common goal.

It was on the issue of how to best achieve this objective that the two diverged. This partitioning can perhaps be best articulated as a division between esoteric and exoteric knowledge. While the SPR actively pursued the status of a scientific institution, opening itself up to paid members and publishing its findings in the public realm, the Golden Dawn remained a highly secretive and closed organisation that did not make its discoveries known to the un-initiated. This is not to suggest that members of the Order acted entirely outside of the public realm; rather, as Mark S. Morrison has demonstrated late-Victorian occultists published frequently in journals such as *Lucifer* and *The Quest*, with Aleister Crowley going as far as to bankroll his own periodical, *The Equinox*.<sup>182</sup> Further, though writers like Sharp and Yeats did not refer directly to the secret society, their work was infused with the language and imageries of magic, ceremonial rites and ancient texts. Nonetheless, where the SPR carried out its research with an audience in mind, the Golden Dawn's appeal lay largely with its exclusivity. This public/private divide arguably impacted upon their differing approaches to questions of data and experimental practice. As Yeats's assertion that it was not the desire for 'evidence' that drove him to the séance made clear, a significant disparity existed in terms of motivation and desired outcome: while the SPR sought 'proofs', of the survival of the soul after death, of the existence of unseen forces, of the possibility of communication between minds, initiates into the Order distanced themselves from these grubby empirical concerns.

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<sup>180</sup> Myers, 'The Subliminal Consciousness', *PSPR* 7 (1891-2), p. 306

<sup>181</sup> Myers, 'The Subliminal Consciousness', *PSPR* 8 (1892), 334

<sup>182</sup> Mark S. Morrison, 'The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres', *Journal of Modern Literature* 31.2 (Winter 2008), 1-22

Critically, the two also diverged on the issue of technique. At first glance this partition seems absolute: psychical research investigated ‘spontaneous’ crisis apparitions, ‘up-rushes’ from subliminal to supraliminal levels of consciousness and moments of unwitting clairvoyance, while the Golden Dawn instituted a rigorous system of magical training on the assurance that precisely these types of experience could be bent to the will of the individual. Over the course of the ‘Enquiry into Second Sight in the Highlands’ Ada Goodrich-Freer produced a reading of the phenomenon largely negotiated through the epistemologies and conceptual frameworks offered up by late-Victorian psychical research. Her first report to the Society remarked of the data collected so far, ‘the super-normal part of the stories run on line with which we are familiar—premonition often externalized in sight or sound,—thought transference—information subconsciously acquired’. The power was best understood as a ‘sort of extension or exaltation of the normal faculties, the ‘prophecies’ being in many instances closely analogous to the cases crystal vision, automatic writing, or other forms of externalising an idea, which may be due to memory or unconscious observation’. No ‘empirical method’ was involved in these visions, rather as suspected the ‘general belief seemed to be strongly in favour of spontaneous phenomena’.<sup>183</sup> Where Sharp/Macleod identified second sight as the reality shaping power of the imagination, Goodrich-Freer reiterated the absolute ‘spontaneity of their visions’; the seer was the unwitting recipient of knowledge dredged up from the deeper levels of the self, rather than active participant in the creation of that knowledge.<sup>184</sup>

However, the division between the inactive psychical subject and the active occult subject was complicated somewhat by the connections and symmetries ‘Miss X’ habitually drew between her own experiences of seership and that of the second-sighted. In addition to publicising an ancestrally Scottish heritage and a childhood affinity with the folk traditions of the north, Goodrich-Freer also sought to identify with the subjects of her investigation as ‘adepts in their own line’.<sup>185</sup> Prior to the Highland tour, her engagement with the SPR was as both researcher and psychical practitioner. Lengthy articles for the *PSPR*, such as ‘A Record of Telepathic and other Experiences’ and ‘Subliminal Messages’, negotiated a space between detached

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<sup>183</sup> *JSPR* (January 1896) 184

<sup>184</sup> Miss X, ‘Second Sight in the Highlands’, *Borderland* 3 (January, 1896) 57-61 (60)

<sup>185</sup> Miss X, ‘Second Sight in the Highlands’, *Borderland* 2 (January, 1895) 56-59

scientific observations and carefully documented psychical experimentation. In paper titled ‘Recent Experiments in Crystal-Vision’, for instance, Miss X began by giving a history of scrying—recorded instances in ancient cultures, its prominence in Indian folklore and the famous visionary power of John Dee—before going on to delineate the parallels and echoes in her own experience.<sup>186</sup> Goodrich-Freer routinely characterised her visionary powers as both embodied and learned. They are uncomplicatedly part of her: we are told that she ‘habitually think[s] in terms of sight’ and that ‘every idea or recollection, consciously dwelt upon, is visualised, and in many cases, dramatised—that is my pictures have life and movement’.<sup>187</sup> Yet at the same time the fact of well-documented experimentation implied the exercise of will and the cultivation of technique. An article on ‘The Art of Crystal Gazing’ in *Borderland*, for example, provided the reader with detailed instructions on ‘how to begin’ practicing this form of divination, and in a letter to Myers written during the Highland investigation, she reported that, ‘We have had much talk of Crystal-Gazing and I hope many will try it’.<sup>188</sup> The democratic appeal of this special vision, which involved fixing the gaze upon a crystal or other luminous surface, made it an interesting example of where questions of skill and technique came to bear upon psychical subjects.

In his introduction to Northcote W. Thomas’s *Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying* (1905), Lang recounted how having purchased a ‘glass ball’ in St. Andrews, he found that people of ‘both sexes’ and of ‘many social experiences’ were able to perceive images on its ‘milky’ surface: from ‘my cook of that day [...] to golfers, men of business, men of letters, a physician [...] friends, kinsfolk and chance acquaintances of my own’.<sup>189</sup> Theorised as ‘after-images’ or ‘objectivations of ideas or images consciously or unconsciously present in the mind’, crystal gazing provided a means to explore half-forgotten memories and unconsciously imbibed information.<sup>190</sup> Prior to this, Land had recorded the details of some ‘experiments’ undertaken with a ‘Miss Angus’ in *The Making of Religion* (1898). One of these ‘tests’ involved an ‘inquirer’ writing down a ‘statement of his thoughts’

<sup>186</sup> Miss X, ‘Recent Experiments in Crystal-Vision’, *PSPR* 5 (May 1889)

<sup>187</sup> Miss X, ‘Subliminal Messages’ *PSPR* 11, p. 123

<sup>188</sup> Miss X, ‘The Art of Crystal Gazing’, *Borderland* 1 (Jan, 1894) and Ada Goodrich-Freer to Frederic Myers quoted in *Strange Things*, p. 52

<sup>189</sup> Andrew Lang introduction to Northcote W. Thomas, *Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying* Northcote W. Thomas (London: Alexander Moring, 1905), pp. xi-xii. See also Andrew Lang, ‘Magic Mirrors and Crystal Gazing’, *Monthly Review* 5 (1901)

<sup>190</sup> Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (London, 1894), p. 217

in a sealed letter, while Miss Angus submitted ‘her description of the picture seen by her’, after which Lang would compare the two for correspondences; and in another he took her to the scene of an ‘historical crime’ and asked her to ‘visualise the incidents of the crime’.<sup>191</sup> Elsewhere Lang drew an important distinction between the ‘mundane’ visualising powers of ‘Miss Angus’ and those possessed by ‘Miss X’, who ‘can consciously put a group of fanciful characters into the crystal’.<sup>192</sup> While ‘anybody can turn the ball about till he gets a view of a frozen lake bordered by snowy hills’ and ‘of course, the person who does this knows what he is doing, knows that he is making up his landscape intentionally’, but if a ‘band of skaters suddenly begins to circle about the glassy lake of the landscape this composed that is a very different thing’. The arrival of moving figures or otherwise unexpected elements presumably signalling the operation of visionary powers beyond those exercised by the ‘ordinary’ imagination.<sup>193</sup>

Over the course of the investigation into second sight, crystal vision delineated something of a cultural boundary. Where for the London-based researcher it composes a method of subliminal research, for the Highlander it appears to be an ‘exercise of magic and witchcraft’.<sup>194</sup> In a letter to Lord Bute, Peter Dewar, the Gaelic-speaking clergyman charged with drafting and distributing the first schedule of questions, reported that his Highland parishioners ‘know little or nothing of the use of the crystal or of hypnotism. In fact they are inclined to look on both as ‘black arts’!’.<sup>195</sup> Distinguishing the sophisticated knowledge of the metropole—denoted here by the concept of ‘hypnotism’—from the superstitious reluctance of the uneducated to accommodate this new knowledge, psychical research restated its authority as a scientific body. Yet this distancing terminology is complicated by the profound cultural, genealogical and spiritual proximity sought by Goodrich-Freer. Writing to Lord Bute to give an account of the investigation’s progress, she said of Tìree:

The atmosphere (using the word in its psychic sense) of the island is, I should think, very conducive to ‘second sight’ and asserts that ‘at all costs’ I intend to return to Tìree and to this neighbourhood—Lochaber, another year. I mean

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<sup>191</sup> Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (London, 1898)

<sup>192</sup> *Cock Lane and Commonsense*, p. 219 and *Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic*, p. xxviii

<sup>193</sup> *Cock Lane and Commonsense*, p. 219

<sup>194</sup> Miss X, ‘Second Sight in the Highlands’, *Borderland* 2 (January 1895) 56-59

<sup>195</sup> Peter Dewar to Lord Bute 17 August 1892, quoted in *Strange Things*, p. 59

in the most serious sense, when I say, that I feel my vocation is here, and that for the 'Sensitive' this country with its atmosphere, its traditions, and its practical teachings, is the place of study<sup>196</sup>

The identification of the Highlands and Islands as a 'place of study' for the urban seer was significant on two counts. Firstly, this strongly connoted the kind of magical training identified chiefly with occult practice, which indicated a closer articulation between the Golden Dawn and certain elements of the SPR than usually acknowledged; and secondly, this implied the existence of a power relation with the potential to transform the second-sighted islander from an object of study to something like a visionary mentor.

Considering the complex processes of self-fashioning at play in the creation of Miss X/Ada Goodrich-Freer and William Sharp/Fiona Macleod, it is arguable that their adoption of self-consciously Gaelic identities acted beyond appropriation—cultural, linguistic, political or otherwise—to impact the narrative components of second sight itself. Second sight was not simply transacted into English-speaking culture and made subject to its metaphorical requirements. Rather the fieldwork of Goodrich-Freer and the mystical poetics of Macleod intervened in and actively shaped the pre-visionary power. While seeking to maintain the connection between visionary ability and racial inheritance, in their creative self-fashioning and new interpretive frameworks, both worked to recast the power of second sight as in various ways, newly accessible. For Macleod this was achieved through the exploration of an eternal Celtic *geist*, capable of reinvigorating and revolutionising the stale materialism of late nineteenth-century Britain. In pursuing the idea of a Celtic 'spirit', one no longer constrained by taxonomic racial models, the discourses of Celtic Revivalism cast second sight in a similarly expansive light. Writing in the essay 'Iona', Macleod described it as a 'faculty so apt to the spiritual law that one wonders why it is so set apart in doubt', confirmed as it is by 'interior wisdom' and 'spiritual logic'.<sup>197</sup> Transacted into the magical practices of the Golden Dawn and the symbolic landscapes of Macleod's supernatural fictions second sight was realised as a powerful force for understanding and shaping 'reality'. Along similar lines, by seeking to understand Highland life from an immersed position, Goodrich-Freer situated

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<sup>196</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer to Lord Bute, quoted in *Strange Things*, p.56

<sup>197</sup> Fiona Macleod, 'Iona', *Fortnightly Review* (April 1900), 692-709

second sight at a point of tension between the perceived peculiarities of that culture and democratising imperatives of popular psychism.

## CONCLUSION

In her discussion of second sight on Iona, published in 1899, Ada Goodrich-Freer wrote of the testimony she had collected:

Let it be granted; yet such stories, though specifically false, may be generically true; the detail may be merely an invention of time, the type is real for all eternity. We lose more than we gain by their rejection; they may not be evidential of the latest theory of science, but they remain as testimony to the inherent beauty of human life, they are immortal, because they are fragments of the divine life with which one day is as a thousand years<sup>198</sup>

Juxtaposing the timelessness of second sight with the faddish affectations of modern science, Goodrich-Freer asserted the hermeneutic superiority of the former: while understandings of what constitutes 'truth' are historically constituted, the prophetic narratives of the Highlander preceded and exceeded these shallow temporal concerns. Writing three years after the inquiry and her acrimonious break with the SPR, this description took on an almost justificatory tone. It was not that the investigation failed as such, but rather that psychical research, 'the latest theory of science', had asked the wrong questions of this eternal visionary experience. Though never affiliated with the Celtic Twilight, Goodrich-Freer's characterisation of the 'immortal' and 'divine' seer certainly connoted aspects of this literary renaissance. Respecting Robert O'Driscoll's description of Revivalists as having 'deliberately created as a counter-movement to the materialism of the post-Darwinian age' which rejected the presumption that 'literature was a criticism of visible life' and asserted instead that it 'was a revelation of an invisible world', it is arguable that Goodrich-Freer held similar sympathies.<sup>199</sup> Understood as an extension of her original methodology, 'to know the Highlander' and 'seek him on his native heath', this later commentary on second sight asserted the need to consider this strange visionary power through 'native'

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<sup>198</sup>Ada Goodrich-Freer, 'Saint Columba: The Father of Second Sight' in *Essays in Psychical Research* (London: George Redway, 1899), p. 299

<sup>199</sup> Robert O'Driscoll, 'The Aesthetic and Intellectual Foundations of the Celtic Literary Revival in Ireland', in *The Celtic Continuum* (New York: Braziller, 1982), p. 405

conceptions of what constituted reality. As John MacInnes has suggested, ‘Gaelic culture presents us with a strong sense of territory in which place names are charged with historical and legendary associations [...] On such a plane, our divisions of time into past, present and future may not [...] have the relevance that we are very much inclined to take for granted’.<sup>200</sup> To understand second sight is to become the ideal fieldworker, capable of adopting the position of a cultural insider, while retaining the authoritative voice accorded to the outside observer.

As John Campbell has highlighted in relation to ‘Miss Freer’s’ un-credited use of the folklore collected by Fr. Allan Macdonald, the negotiation of this dual position was one problematically bound to acts of appropriation. While, in his attempt to restore the reputation of this Gaelic folklorist Campbell presents Goodrich-Freer’s alleged plagiarism as a scandalous and unjustifiable crime, it arguably represents only one example of a far wider instrumentalisation of Highland culture. In her discussion of the Celtic Revival, Deborah Fleming argues that members of this movement spoke for rather than from the peripheries: they ‘sought to speak for people other than themselves, to “represent” them to the world, and to use them in order to establish a new national culture, and an audience for themselves’.<sup>201</sup> As is made explicit by the theatricalised Gaelic identities taken up by Goodrich-Freer, William Sharp and other members of the Golden Dawn, the rediscovery of the ‘Celt’ at the turn of the century was largely an expression of the desires of dominant culture, rather than a means of letting the ‘subaltern speak’.<sup>202</sup> Recalling the adoption of distinctly aristocratic Highland identities by Aliester Crowley and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, it is significant that both Goodrich-Freer and Sharp sought to privilege the image of the ‘noble’ Celt. Attempting to explain his connection to Fiona Macleod, Sharp informed several correspondents that the Highland novelist was a distant cousin, married to a rich and secretive Laird; and similarly, in her *Outer Isles* (1902) Goodrich-Freer was at pains to emphasise the ‘inherent’ nobility of the average Highlander, derived from their having historically lived on close terms with those of the ‘higher ranks’.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> John MacInnes, ‘The Seer in Gaelic Tradition’, *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions* ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1989), p. 11

<sup>201</sup> Deborah Fleming, *‘A man who does not exist’: The Irish Peasant in the Work of W.B. Yeats and J. M. Synge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 21

<sup>202</sup> Galati Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988)

<sup>203</sup> Ada Goodrich-Freer, *Outer Isles* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1902) pp. 84-5

In regard to second sight, this imagined ancestral nobility served as a means to distance the activities of the mystical Highland seer, from the type of work performed by the spiritualist medium: as Goodrich-Freer asserted, ‘the suggestion of Spirit Return’ is one rejected with ‘strong expressions of dislike’ by the typical seer.<sup>204</sup> This finds an echo in late-nineteenth-century occultism’s movement away from the passive mediumship associated with spirit communication toward a new model of learned magic and clairvoyant technique. As is laid bare by the aristocratic flavour of the Golden Dawn’s ‘Highlandism’, the development of technique was one predicated on the exclusion of the kind of plebeian experimentation long associated with practices such as phrenology and mesmerism. Deriving its authority from texts or ciphers, restricting its membership and operating largely in secret, the Order presented the antithesis of the spiritualist movement’s democratic policy. On the founding of William T. Stead’s *Borderland*, H. W. Massingham at *The Daily Chronicle* commented that, ‘If I am to study mysticism, I will have it from the great masters—from Blake, from Swedenborg and the rest, not from lisping spooks and stuttering clairvoyants. In other words I do not want a short cut to the supernatural’.<sup>205</sup> Reading the magical practices of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as an expression of a similar desire, it is arguable that the transformation of second sight from an involuntary power to a mystical technique encoded elite and anti-democratic ideologies. After all, this technique was one uncovered through scholarly learning and honed in urban temples, activities and sites from which the Highland seer was arguably excluded.

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<sup>204</sup> *JSPR* 7 (January, 1895)

<sup>205</sup> William T. Stead, ‘Some More Opinions on the Study of Borderland’ 1 (October 1893), 107



## CONCLUSION

On the 14 September 2014 Scotland will decide whether or not to remain a constituent nation of the British Isles. As the referendum draws nearer and newspaper editorials north and south of the border stake out their positions, public discourse is once again occupied by questions of national identity and local culture. For those ill disposed to independence, the accusation of nationalist ‘mythmaking’ serves as a potent rhetorical weapon and is duly employed by commentators from across the political spectrum. *The Telegraph* urges that the myth of a ‘pre-1979 Caledonian land of milk and honey’ be put to rest; *The Times* reports that ‘Scotland’s leading historian’ has warned of pernicious influence of the ‘cult of Robert Burns’ in producing an overly-romanticised vision of the county’s past; and *The Guardian* wonders why tartan ‘for all its treasured place in the royal’s family’s dressing up box’ remains ‘innocuously iconic to nationalists’.<sup>1</sup> The Scottish National Party peddles, according to their detractors, a ‘shortbread tin’ image of the country that relies upon a highly selective reading of history and the constant circulation of stock images: majestic scenery, Highland cattle, medieval castles and tartan clad pipers, which have little or nothing to do with the realities of everyday life. Though no pro-unionist has thus far utilised the rhetorical possibilities of second sight, as Daniel Defoe did in his ‘The Highland Vision, or The Scots New Prophecy’ (1712), to ensure the survival of the United Kingdom, it is significant that so much of this modern debate relies upon the problematic historical representations established in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Particularly telling are the multiple resurrections to which Sir Walter Scott has recently been subject. On the reopening of Abbotsford House, Scott’s baronial castle, Alex Salmond caused something of furor by claiming that were he alive today the novelist ‘might have moved towards a ‘Yes’ vote’.<sup>3</sup> In response, Professor David Purdie of the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club maintained that ‘he was a very patriotic Scotsman, like me and many others, who are nationalists with a small ‘n’. He was very much a Unionist all his days and promoted the Union through his

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<sup>1</sup> *The Telegraph* 10 April 2013, *The Times* January 24 2013 and *The Guardian* 22 September 2013

<sup>2</sup> See Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romance Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University, 1997), p. 98

<sup>3</sup> *The Scotsman* 6 July 2013

choreographing of the great 1822 visit of George IV to Edinburgh'.<sup>4</sup> A month prior to this public intervention, the Walter Scott Club had been forced to issue a statement in defence of the author when the director charged with reimagining Gioachino Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*—an 1819 opera based upon 'The Lady of Lake'—accused Scott of 'turning Highlanders into savages' and of having 'quietly expunged them from history'.<sup>5</sup> In reply, 'leading Scottish academics' asserted that the author's 'great aim in life was the promotion of Scotland as a unity within the United Kingdom' and that he greatly admired the courage and characteristics of the Highlanders'.<sup>6</sup> Most revelatory is the curt reply proffered by Professor David Hewitt, the current editor of the *Waverley* novels, who when asked to respond said only, 'That statement from London is absurd'.<sup>7</sup> In the same moment as Scott is reiterated as an advocate of the Union and the place of the Highlands in that partnership, he is also defended against aspersions being cast by observers from the south, constitutionally unqualified to comment on Scottish literature. Part of what these little controversies illustrate is what Cairns Craig has described as, 'the fundamental role of narrative in the formation of national identity', by which the nation's 'values are collected, recollected and projected'.<sup>8</sup> Called into the service of multiple ideological positions, the instrumentalisation of Scott's 'legacy' underlines the processes of fabrication and construction implicated in the notion of nationhood itself.

While this thesis has not engaged in any detail with the nationalist or Home Rule movements of the nineteenth century, images of Scottish identity and readings of Scottish history have greatly informed its treatment of the second-sight phenomenon. Though it may have been possible to restrict this project to purely Scottish materials or to consider the topic from the perspective of the Highland seer, I have found it in this instance more profitable to situate second sight at a point of exchange between two of Britain's constituent nations. By framing this phenomenon as the product of intellectual traffic between England and Scotland, I have attempted to shed light on how investigations into this strange subject were overlaid with overt national, cultural and religious meanings. Considering the second-sight tradition as one delineated and formalised by ongoing dialogue over the significance of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *The Herald* 19 May 2013

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) pp. 10-11

culturally and linguistically remote Highlands in relation to the United Kingdom, this thesis has dealt with the language of borders and national mythmaking. With this in mind, it has been fascinating to observe the resurgence and contestation of particular histories, fictions and imageries in a political present occupied once more by questions of Scottish and British nationhood.

The basic narrative sketched out by this thesis has concerned the transformation of second sight from an involuntary and largely unwanted faculty associated with the geographically distant and culturally mysterious Scottish Highlands to a super-normal facet of the psyche, potentially accessible and exploitable by all. We have noted how the theories of magnetic influence and somnambulistic states associated with mesmerism in the early portion of nineteenth century established the groundwork for this change: with medical practitioners pressing a physiological reading of extra-sensory abilities and writers like Catherine Crowe incorporating uncanny visionary experiences into new theories of the imagination. The plebeian experimentation encouraged by mesmerism obtained newly transcendental meanings with the advent of the spiritualist movement, the democratic epistemologies of which allowed for the possibility that anyone may become a channel for the revelations of the dead. Written into the movement's histories, the power of second sight in the Highlands became exemplary of the workings of spiritual laws now being made manifest in parlours all over Britain. The Society for Psychical Research, founded to investigate the claims of mesmerism and spiritualism, theorised instances of foreknowledge as paradigmatic instances of telepathic communication or the working of subliminally accessed memory. Subsumed by a revolutionary model of the unconscious, the content of the second-sighted narrative now pertained primarily to the contents of the self, rather than to exterior events. Viewed through the lens of the *fin-de-siècle* occult, the depth psychology being developed by the SPR became a blueprint for transcendental self-exploration. For members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, second sight was a technique to aid adventures into symbolic or hidden realities, obtained through the study of ancient texts and cultivated through a programme of magical training. We have also noted how investigative cultures not necessarily sympathetic to the veridicality of prophetic vision, thinking here of Edward B. Tylor's comparative anthropology or David Brewster's supernatural debunking, similarly produced second

sight as a universal quality: whether as a delusion of the eye or as a revival of animistic thought common to an earlier stage of human development.

Transacted through a series of investigative cultures, phrenology, mesmerism, anthropology, folklore, spiritualism and psychical research, this uncanny foresight was at least partly transformed by the ‘scientising’ elements and universalising language of these discourses. Perhaps most telling is the way in which the power of second seeing is written into a much broader narrative concerning the nature of the imagination itself. When, for example, Jane Carlyle wrote to friend in 1851 of her ‘second sight’ she did not literally claim the power to see death shrouds or spectral funeral processions, rather she employed it to connote the possession of a particularly vivid insight: ‘It was nothing you *said* in your letter which made this impression on me, but what you did *not* say, which I seemed to read by *second sight* behind the outward visible words’.<sup>9</sup> More than a synonym for special intuition, it was also put to work in what Peter Womack describes as the task of ‘imagining the imagination’. Initially taken up by Romantic writers, whose conflation of the seer with the poet recast the power as an expression of the complex relations between creative production and the mysteries of the unconscious mind, second sight was increasingly understood in terms of its potential as a dynamic metaphor.<sup>10</sup> Revived in the discourses surrounding the late-nineteenth-century romance novel and in the theorisation of the subliminal self, the visionary mechanisms of this prophetic tradition were placed in the service of the ‘mythopoetic’: a universal urge to produce unrealities and one of the human mind’s higher capacities. Attending to Michael Saler’s ‘antinomial’ approach to questions of modern enchantment or disenchantment, which finds that ‘the corollary of the alleged pre-dominance of instrumental reason’ is the ‘greater acceptance of the imagination as a source of multiple yet finite meanings that enchant’, it is arguable that part of what second sight speaks most clearly to is the remarkable co-dependency of rational and supernatural in this period.<sup>11</sup> While the Celtic Revivalists covered by the final chapter of this thesis largely refused this ontology, insisting

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Welsh Carlyle to Lady Airlie, 27 December 1851, *The Carlyle Letters Online [CLO]* ed. Brent E. Kinser (Duke University Press, 14 September 2007), accessed 22 September 2013

<sup>10</sup> Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 94

<sup>11</sup> Michael Saler, ‘Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review’, *American Historical Review*, (June 2006), 692-716 (714). As Saler has it ‘The binary and the dialectical approach, with their ‘either/or’ logic, have been common since the late nineteenth century, but the antinomial approach, with its ‘both/and’ logic, seems to have become the prevailing one in recent years’ (693). See also Saler and Joshua Landy, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (2009)

instead upon the symbolic or the imaginative as the real, their production of a collective ‘Celtic *spirit*’ similarly re-cast the prophetic faculty as a state of mind. As William Sharp had it, ‘the imagination is in truth the *second-sight* of the mind’.<sup>12</sup>

Yet this is complicated somewhat when we recall that this pronouncement was one made in the same moment as its author was busy fashioning himself as a Gaelic-speaking, croft-dwelling persona, replete with an ancient and second-sighted heritage. Though ‘Fiona Macleod’ has been variously cast as a typically Modernist play on identity; an expression of the ‘rapidly intensifying pressures on gender and sexual identity in the 1880s and 1890s’; and the ‘playing out of psychological strains’, for the purposes of this thesis she speaks most clearly to a re-imagined ‘Highlandism’ persisting at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>13</sup> Detectable elsewhere in the tartan theatricals that constituted the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn’s Scottish presence and in Ada Goodrich-Freer’s claims to Highland ancestry, second sight’s new universality was troubled by these performative gestures. Though this desire for proximity was not exclusive to this context, spiritualist claims to Highland heritage composing an obvious forerunner, it did take on new forms of embodiment at the turn of the century. Where earlier chapters of this study had witnessed everyone from romantically inclined poets and curious tourists to spiritually minded mesmerists and nostalgic folklorists profess sympathy and admiration for the Highland seer, these observers did not seek to fully adopt this identity. In their exploration of empathetic extremes, thinking here of Fiona Macleod as Sharp’s *animus* personality, these late-Victorian thinkers reshaped the power of second sight in unexpected ways. The tension that has underpinned this thesis, between the specific and the general, briefly falls away at this particular historic juncture. While previous readings have posited second sight as either an exclusive faculty/hallucination or a universally available power/delusion, in their creative embodiment of Highland identities, figures such as Goodrich-Freer and Sharp insisted on it as *both* these things. In other words, the fabled prophetic vision of the Scottish Highlander was now a common facet of the

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<sup>12</sup> William Sharp to Horace Scudder January 2 1895 ALS Harvard Houghton and Fiona Macleod, ‘The Later Work of Mr. Yeats’, *North American Review* (1902)

<sup>13</sup> Terry L. Myers, *The Sexual Tensions of William Sharp: A Study of the Birth of Fiona MacLeod, Incorporating Two Lost Worlds, ‘Ariadne in Naxos’ and ‘Beatrice’* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 4 and Flavia Alaya, *William Sharp—Fiona Macleod: 1855-1905* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 116. See T.M. Devine, ‘The Making of Highlandism’ in *Clanship to Crofter’s War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994)

psyche, but its accessibility remained predicated upon the tropes and imageries of a particular national mythology.

The introduction to this thesis queried why the Society for Psychical Research's failed inquiry into second sight in the Highlands might be of interest to the modern historian, and highlighted its absence from scholarly accounts of the organisation's formative years. In seeking out the Scottish seer in Victorian culture, this study has attempted to make the case for this figure as a valuable subject for historians of science, literature and popular culture. Refracted through the eyes of English-speaking observers, the prophetic Highlander and the imageries of second sight were called into the service of multiple investigative regimes: phrenology, mesmerism, spiritualism, anthropology and psychical research. As such this analysis has necessarily dealt in the boundaries, interconnections and tensions between these disciplines: a methodology that has sought to reflect upon the usefully smudged areas of nineteenth-century history, in which seemingly distinct discourses and realms of experience collide. Stepping slightly away from the wealth of modern scholarship dedicated to the Victorian's unique relationship with science and the supernatural, this study has explored the problematic relation between peasant lore gathered from remote Gaelic communities and investigative cultures inculcated at the metropole. This has been with the aim of bringing the language of colonisation to bear more directly on the study of heterodox religious and scientific practice. By reading the Highlander as one of imperialism's 'others', this thesis has attended to the complex relations between the study of 'folk' customs and the politics of representation. Imagining this as a series of interactions, rather than only a hierarchal relation or a process of appropriation, this thesis has explored how the prophetic powers of a 'primitive' people troubled understandings of temporality and history making in the nineteenth century.

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