Gothicising a Poetics of Displacement: *Immigrants/Effects*

Catherine M. Greenwood
BA (Distinction) University of Victoria
MA University of New Brunswick

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Summary

This creative-critical thesis situates a poetics of displacement within a Gothic mode.

Part 1 comprises three critical chapters informed by interdisciplinary research in poetry and Gothic studies. In the first two chapters, I identify proto-Gothic ballads – folk songs transmitted orally and collected between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries – as source material in ballad adaptions by twentieth-century Scottish immigrant poets. Chapter 1 tracks Helen Adam's reinvention of Scottish Gothic balladry in the context of San Francisco's poetry Renaissance; she manifests her transformative displacement in her performative persona as a post-Romantic Gothic visionary, and my analysis shows how the 'fairy ground' of her homeland is reified in a modern American poetics. Chapter 2 focuses on the hybrid form of Stephen Scobie's 1987 documentary poem *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, in which an Orcadian woman enters Canada's early fur-trade disguised as a man. My reading applies the Foucauldian heterotopia to the poem's otherworldly realm and discovers a historical gothic narrative set in a mythical frontier environment with taxing effects on economic migrants. Chapter 3 surveys Arctic Gothic poetry that depicts the north as a sublime geographical space. I argue that as the climate crisis transforms the formerly frozen north, its *unheimlich* literary topography must also change, from a site of obscure terror to one of exposed horror.

Part 2 is a reflective commentary on the ecoGothic modes used in my practice-based research. Referencing Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's monster theory and Robert Macfarlane's concept of Anthropocene unburials, I situate my poetry sequence *Effects: Poems* within a range of subgenres from folk horror to ecohorror.

In Part 3, my critical research culminates in forty-one ecoGothic poems. *Effects: Poems* is set in a Siberian heterotopia where mammoth-tusk hunters exhume ice-age animals from melting ground. I curate these Anthropocene unburials in a poetic *Wunderkammer* that heeds the cultural function of the monster as a warning. My method is also extractive, pulling tropes from the bodies of earlier texts to create a poetry of displacement that references the Gothic and reveals the existential horrors announced by climate change and permafrost unburials.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my brother David, and my aunts, uncles and friends who also departed during the time I was writing it.

May they find their way home.

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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_____ (2023) 'Tusk Hunters'. *Canadian Literature* Special Issue *Poetics and Extraction*, Issue 251, p. 125.

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_____ (2022) 'The River's Edge'. *Route 57's The Book of Water*, Issue 18, 2022, p. 9.

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Part 1: Gothicising a Poetics of Displacement: Immigrants/Effects

Introduction: The Old Country

> Her brief identity was not her own
> But theirs who formed and sent her out
> To wear the proud bones of her clan, and live its story,
> Who now receive back into the ground
> Worn features of ancestral mould.
>
> 'Highland Graveyard', Kathleen Raine (1965)

My practice-as-research PhD thesis, titled *Immigrants/Effects*, is a book-length poetry sequence prefaced by critical analysis of selected Gothic poetry and an exegesis of the creative work. Both the creative and critical elements are informed by interdisciplinary research in Scottish and Canadian poetry and Gothic Studies – particularly the ecoGothic – and supplemented by relevant theories and concepts regarding space, place, and the sublime. In this thesis, I identify source material in twentieth-century ballads by Scottish immigrants Helen Adam and Stephen Scobie, and the Gothicised mode in which these ballads represent displacement, followed by a survey of Arctic ecoGothic poetry that proposes the need for a new category of the sublime. The culmination of this research is my production of a poetry sequence that illustrates a Gothic poetics of displacement set in a melting Arctic sublime. An intermediary reflective commentary linking these critical and creative parts situates the poetry sequence as ecoGothic and identifies the various effects I strive to achieve.

In this introductory chapter, I provide a background for my interest in these topics, followed by a statement of the aims and objectives of the thesis and my research questions. Finally, I offer two brief readings of poems related specifically to the Scottish ballad tradition, both as illustrations of my method of analysis in the three critical chapters, and as paradigms of Gothic literary heterotopias, a key concept referenced throughout Part 1.

The title for my project is taken from the steamer trunk my parents brought from Scotland to Canada in 1956. Industry in Glasgow, including at the Clyde river shipyards where my father had apprenticed before joining the Merchant Navy, was in decline, and my

newly married parents joined a renewed exodus of emigrants seeking opportunity overseas.[1] T.M. Devine (2012) charts the diminishment of Scotland's shipbuilding industry in the 1950s, noting that in the years between 1947 and 1958 the Clyde's output of world share fell from 18 % to 4.5% (p. 255). After being halted by the Second World War, Scottish emigration resumed in earnest and between 1951 and 1981, when 753,000 Scots left the country, with more than half of those migrants headed 'for new lives overseas' (Devine, 2012, p. 270). Labelled *Immigrants Effects* [*sic*], with the misspelled address of *Nanimo* as its destination (the Vancouver Island town, now city, of Nanaimo), my parents' steamer trunk held not mere objects but things bearing traces of *hame* (the Scots name for home).

These 'effects' in the sense of immaterial belongings – lore, history, tradition, inheritance, superstition, identity – are the touchstone for my inquiry into Scottish Gothic poetry by, and about, immigrants. This element of the thesis broadens into a survey of Arctic poetry and its various applications of the sublime, followed by a critical exegesis of my practice-based research, and finally, the resulting poetry manuscript; 'effects' in the sense of consequence, then, and also of aesthetic result, are my point of entry into a Gothicised poetic narrative with a subtext that gestures toward the horrors of displacement resulting from climate change.

I had planned to approach this sequence in a Gothic mode because a strain of horror and the supernatural already exists in my poetry, and I wanted to push the possibilities of the idiom. However, if we agree with David Punter (2012) that 'all poems are epitaphs' and that 'the Gothic and the uncanny are inextricably bound up' (pp. 258, 262), I may have gravitated by intuition to a medium ideal for exploring issues of identity and displacement. Unpacking Freud's analysis of the term 'uncanny', Punter notes that 'the German word *Heimlich* […] ends up encompassing its opposite, the "unhomely," "the unfamiliar"' (2012, p. 253). In this sense, the *unheimlich* place is an unfamiliar one, and dislocation is essentially uncanny.

[1]Outmigration had a deleterious impact on Scotland's economy, such that Dame Flora MacLeod, 'first female chief of Clan MacLeod', when visiting America in 1953, issued her 'famous plea to the diaspora' to return to Scotland (Devine, 2012, p. 283).

Displacement

As a first-generation Canadian with a received notion of 'Scottishness,' my identity was constructed through an unexamined process of self-othering – not English, certainly not American, but not quite 'Canadian' either. Northrop Frye, writing as the 1967 centenary of Canada's confederation drew near, suggested that the Canadian literary imagination – when confronted by its 'famous problem of identity' – was 'less perplexed by the question "Who am I"' than by some such riddle as "Where is here?"' (1995, p. 220). Frye's axiom has been reframed in post-colonial readings of Canadian Gothic, however, in which 'European gothic questions about space (Where am I?) and otherness (What is this?) […] are redirected toward the self (Who am I?)' (Edwards. 2005, p. xxxi). By positing that the mutable immigrant identity is altered by the host environment, I reformulate the riddle to ask instead 'Who am I *here*?' As my chapters on Scottish-American Helen Adam and Scottish-Canadian Stephen Scobie demonstrate, 'belonging' for the immigrant subject is partially a performance; in the work of Adam and Scobie, to 'be longing' is depicted as a state of being, a condition composed of identity plus nostalgia.

Arriving in New York as a visitor in 1939 at the age of thirty, Adam extended her stay when war broke out in Europe, an initial unplanned dislocation that would later become permanent as a matter of choice. Scobie, born in Carnoustie, immigrated to Canada in 1965 at the age of twenty-two to attend university, and like Adam, never moved back to Scotland. Their individual stories represent larger historical patterns, what Devine quantifies as Scotland's huge number of post-war 'mass emigrations' (p. 270). In seeking to name a poetics attributable to such 'displaced persons'– a phrase he attributes to Auden – Stan Smith (2008) suggests that the term 'poetry of exile' overlooks the fact that global displacements are not always 'imposed by force of circumstance' but rather can 'represent the essence of modern liberation from […] the accidents of place and culture' (p. 2). Instead, Smith proposes 'a more appropriate designation' that doesn't have to contend with the 'issues of intentionality and choice raised by the word "exile"' – that term would be 'a poetry of displacement' (2008, p. 2). Further to this, Smith notes,

> Displacement […] is not simply an external, geopolitical phenomenon. It is also an internal process, in which the subject is cast out from its own history and culture, sometimes from the very language in which it has been constituted. Yet, oddly, it continues to be the carrier and medium through which that culture comes to know itself. (2008, p. 10)

Helen Adam, in her performative role as a bardic matriarch in the San Francisco avant-garde poetry scene of the 1950s and 60s was such a medium, revivifying the Scots ballad of her homeland and utilising its archaic vernacular, yet in a poetry attentive to the social concerns of her modern American context. As Ian Brown (2020) notes, 'all enactments of identity with any mythic power […] are manufactured – in a sense false and bogus – usually with more than one purpose embodied in their creation' (p. 143).[2] A similar multiplicity is evident in Scobie's 1987 long poem, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn,* based on the life of an Orkney woman who secured employment in Canada's early 19th-century fur trade – in another wave of Scots economic emigration – by disguising herself as a man. Alan R. Knight (1990) reads the poem as implicitly allegorical. Like his creation Isabel Gunn, who is 'both a Scottish Isabel and a Canadian Isabel', Scobie is also 'double':

> Writers and immigrants face the same doubleness that comes when the consciousness attempts to translate this experience. A person becomes two people, both subject and object, and so identity becomes a synthesis of the two, located in that space between. Both places must be written. (Knight, 1990, p. 53)

This thesis seeks to situate such a poetics of displacement within a Gothic mode. Further, I propose that the term 'Gothic poetry' does not enjoy quite the same currency of 'Gothic novel'. Indeed, in her introduction to *The Longman Anthology of Gothic Verse*, Caroline Franklin notes among critics 'a marked reluctance to acknowledge the existence of a category such as "Gothic verse"' (2014, p. 1). Cynthia Sugars (2014) makes a related observation in her introduction to *Canadian Gothic: Literature, History, and the Spectre of Self-Invention*:

> It is a fact rarely acknowledged that what are arguably the two most famous poems in Canadian literature, Robert Service's 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' (1907) and John McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' (1919), contain ghosts. More than that, both poems include a ghostly exhortation from the dead to the living, comparable to Hamlet's father's ghost who impels Hamlet to 'Remember'. Both poems are a call to action, and both are about remembering, memorializing' (p. 1).

My analysis therefore, also considers how the impetus of history informs immigrant poetries, and by what literary heritage these works are haunted (Service, incidentally, was a Scottish immigrant, and McCrae a second-generation Canadian of Scots ancestry). Another key aim,

[2] As Devine reminds us, 'Scots who deride aspects of Scottish-American heritage culture would do well to remember that Highlandism is itself a home-grown product' (2012, p. 281).

subsequent to identifying a Gothic poetics of displacement, is to develop new forms of this in my own practice. The following subset of queries is implicit in both the critical and creative research of this thesis:

- What poetic inheritance characterises a gothic aesthetic?
- What gothic-seeming strategies does the immigrant deploy to construct identity and resist the *unheimlich* or unhomely in the new place?
- What *unheimlich* effects do inhospitable ecologies have on humans and other species?

Foucault's heterotopology is a conceptual reference point threaded throughout Part 1, and is supplemented with other theory appropriate to the particularities under discussion: i.e. Ardener's 'wild zone' model in my reading of Adam's feminist ballad revision in Chapter 1; Proshansky's 'place-identity' theory applied to the immigrant ballad narrative analysed in Chapter 2; and theories of the sublime, along with Jeffery Jerome Cohen's 'Monster Theory', in regard to the Arctic poetry and Anthropocene unburials discussed in Chapter 3.

Shetland Heather and Gothic Ballads

Visible across the Burwick voe from my mother's childhood home in Shetland is a long, barren headland jutting into the sea. Called on the map by one name, in memory and in the mouth it is known by another: *Gallow Hill*. On the other side of that headland is the town of Scalloway, where poet and scholar Lawrence Graham was a schoolmaster for over forty years. Educated in Edinburgh, Graham was a lifelong socialist, and wrote his 'blunt' and often overtly political poems in the Shaetlan dialect, using the vernacular in 'a spirit of solidarity with working-class people' and his fellow Shetlanders (Smith, 2014, pp. 166, 168–69). Many of his poems engage with contemporary issues, such as an oil spill off Shetland's coast or UK politics. Mark Ryan Smith (2014) detects Graham's adaptation of other writers' works in some of these didactic poems – for instance, 'Burns is utilised to withering effect' in a critique of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in a piece called 'Holy Maggie's Prayer' (p. 168). Casting back to the injustices of the past, Graham also wrote a poem called 'Aald Maalie' that dramatises Shetland's history of hanging – then burning – witches on the Gallow Hill:[3]

[3] Mary Queen of Scots introduced a statute banning witchcraft in 1563, but, as Nigel Cawthorne (2019) explains, 'Scottish witch trials did not really take off until the accession of

Why are dey cerryin a fiery braand, midder midder?
Why are dey cerryin a fiery braand?
Dey'll set da heddēr blazin!
Ta burn oot evil fae da laand, Mansie, Mansie,
Tae burn oot evil fae da laand,
Bairn – dönna aks da raeson. (st.7)

Over the course of eight stanzas, 'Aald Maalie' adheres to this dialogue format, and as the child Mansie's questions grow more insistent, the mother's answers become more despairingly evasive; only in the last stanza does the mother respond honestly, finally acknowledging the horror of what Mansie insists she witness –

O, What's yon lowe on Gallow Hill, midder, midder?
O, what's yon lowe on Gallow Hill?
Da flems are leapin: see dem!
Yon's pör aald Maalie of da Gyill, Mansie, Mansie,
Yon's pör aald Maalie of da Gyill –
May da Loard abön forgie dem. (st.8)

When I read the poem in its entirety over the phone to my mother in Canada, where she has lived for most of her adult life, she reminisced about gathering dry heather in Burwick in the autumn, when its flowers died off and the shrub turned brown, to be used as kindling for the peat stove in winter (she also remembered serving the poem's author, 'Lollie', his dinners at the school where he taught, and where she worked in the canteen after graduating). The tinder that sparks Graham's poem, another of his adaptations, is a murder ballad named 'Edward', plucked from Thomas Percy's (1765) three-volume collection of folk ballads, *The Reliques of English Poetry*. Bishop Percy's own work of gathering ancient ballad 'manuscript collections and oral transmissions' – the miscellany that would eventually be compiled as *Reliques* – famously began when he was visiting a friend's house and rescued 'a seventeenth-century folio manuscript' that the maid had been tearing leaves from 'to light the parlour fire' (Franklin, 2014, p. 17).

Internal stylistic evidence from 'Edward' (or 'Edward, Edward: A Scottish Ballad' as it is titled in a 1906 edition of Percy's *Reliques*) situates the ballad as authentically medieval. Carolyn Franklin (2014) states that this provenance is apparent in the ballad's 'dramatic unfolding of a story through dialogue, and its lack of sentimentalism and poetic

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James VI […] in 1567' (p. 196). By the time the Scottish Witchcraft Act was repealed in 1736, 4,400 women had been burnt as witches (Cawthorne, p. 221).

embellishment' (p. 17). [4] A call and response poem in seven stanzas, 'Edward' provides Graham's 'Aald Maalie' with an inverted template of antithesis and refrain:

> 'Quhy dois your brand sae drap wi' bluid,
> Edward, Edward,
> 'Quhy dois your brand sae drap wi' bluid,
> And quhy sae sad gang ye O?'
> 'O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
> Mither, mither,
> O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
> And I had nae mair but hee O.' (st.1)

Here, it is the mother doing the asking, and the horror builds as Edward explains the source of the blood on his sword with a series of falsehoods that escalate in gravity, starting with his hawk, then his horse, before answering truthfully that his father was the true victim. Like Graham's poem, there is a turn in the final lines, only here the twist is even more sinister, as we discover it was the mother herself who counselled her son to commit fratricide. The poem ends with the son's avowal of revenge: 'The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir, / Mither, mither' (st.7, l. 51-2). As Franklin astutely observes, these 'Oedipal tensions anticipate the concerns of much Gothic fiction' (2014, p. 18).

It is in Gothic fiction that one 'watershed text' of modern Gothic poetry appears, the formally innovative 'Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogene' interpolated by Matthew Lewis into his oedipally tense 1796 novel *The Monk* (Robinson, 2012, p. 156).[5] That same year, William Taylor's translation of Gottfried Bürger's dark ballad 'Lenore' (also known as 'Leonora', 'Lenora', or 'Ellenore') deployed the same 'pouncing rhythms, splashy onomatopoeia and archaic diction' as Lewis' Alonzo meter (Thomson and Hoeveler, 2016, p. 152). These ballad imitations would provide 'workable patterns for the poetic tales of terror' later produced by Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey and many others; Scott, in particular, saw in these Germanic inflected supernatural tales a potential tonic for revivifying British poetry at the close of the eighteenth century (Thomson and Hoeveler, 2016, p. 152).

[4] The source ballad for 'Edward' was transmitted by Sir David Dalrymple, who later brought out his own volume of *Ancient Scottish Poems* in 1770 (Franklin, 2014, p. 17).

[5] What Daniel Robinson (2012) calls 'the poetics of weird form' started with such interpolated texts but evolved 'its own modus operandi in freestanding Gothic poems'; the influence of Lewis' 'Alonzo meter' is evident in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Christabel' and Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven' (p. 156)

However, it was Bishop Percy's publication of *Reliques*, nearly thirty years prior to the poems by Lewis and Taylor, that initially sparked a revival of British poetry (Franklin, 2014, p. 17). *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* (1994) delineates the evolution of three main ballad types from the medieval to modern period: the first of these is a rural poetry 'orally composed and transmitted' and inclusive of medieval examples; the second includes 'assimilations and adaptions' of oral ballads reproduced in sixteenth-century chapbooks; and the third type are the literary 'imitations' popularised in the antiquarian revival of the eighteenth century (Brogan, p. 22). Representing the first of these, the orally transmitted medieval ballad 'Edward' is a useful starting point from which to briefly consider the genesis of Gothic ballads. Joel Faflak (2016) wryly notes that the sources Percy reproduced from the 'discarded manuscript [conveniently] "discovered" in a friend's house' were not exact facsimiles, with Percy 'play[ing] fast and loose when editing it, mixing in contemporary examples and altering verses to suit his tastes' (p. 96). Franklin similarly notes that in gleaning other textual fragments and oral transmissions to supplement his collection, Percy 'was not interested in the musical settings of these poems and did not sufficiently prioritise textual accuracy' (2014, p. 17).[6]

Nonetheless, Percy's antiquarian publication 'ignited a craze for indigenous anglophone forms of expression' preferred by the reading public to literature modelled on Greek and Roman texts (Faflak, 2016, p. 96). *Reliques*' nationalist appeal led Scott to compile and publish his own collection of folk ballads in 1802, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Thomson and Hoeveler, 2016, p. 154). Among the variety of influences that I identify in the twentieth and twenty-first century works studied in this thesis are poems by Scott's contemporaries Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Blake – who, Faflak argues,'use[s] the Gothic to animate [the] political spirit […] of the 1790s' (p. 97).[7] But specimens from earlier periods of Scottish folk balladry, such as those gathered by Scott in his *Minstrelsy*, are also key to my readings. One of these, representative of the second type of ballad – the assimilations or adaptions of oral ballads reproduced in broadsides and chapbooks – is 'The Daemon Lover'. Such 'proto-Gothic ballads', as Thomson and Hoeveler

[6] As Kristin Prevallet states, 'the ballad tradition itself is as tenuous and constructed as the identity of Helen Adam' (2007, p. 21)

[7] Faflak locates the Gothic in the first-generation Romanticism of Blake, instancing the 'The Chimney Sweeper' from 1789's 'Songs of Innocence', 'in which child labourers are freed from their "coffins of black"' (Faflak, 2016, p. 98).

term them, deal with 'wonders and monstrous happenings' and other 'proto-Gothic subjects' such as incest, rape, and robbery (2016, p. 151). Francis James Child's five-volume *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898) has proven an invaluable resource in identifying the archaic supernatural Scottish ballads 'Tam Lin', 'The Mother's Malison', and 'The Daemon Lover' – the proto-Gothic underpinnings of twentieth century works by Helen Adam and Stephen Scobie. [8] Thomson and Hoeveler note that during the late eighteenth-century heyday of the Gothic ballad revival 'the distinction between old and new styles, like those between 'original' and 'imitation', 'translation' and 'adaptation', could often become blurred' (p. 152). So it is with my use of these terms, in describing whether something is adapted or imitated. The poems under discussion in this thesis are sometimes a combination of both approaches.

Ballad of the Clyde's Water

A poem that both translates and adapts, while being wholly original, is my second test case of a contemporary poem bearing 'Worn features of ancestral mould' (to employ Raine's metaphor from the epigraph above). The 'Ballad of the Clyde's Water' (2018) by Argyll poet Marion McCready is a resuscitation of Child ballad No. 216, three versions of one folk ballad grouped under the heading 'The Mother's Malison, or, Clyde's Water'. Francis James Child ([1890] 2014) identifies his primary sources for iterations A through C, all circa 1800, as the *Skene MS*, *Jamison's Popular Ballads*, and *Buchan's Ballads of the North of Scotland*, whose original titles, respectively, are 'Clyde's Water', 'Willie and May Margaret', and 'The Drowned Lovers' (p. 185).[9]

In this supernatural ballad of forbidden love and interfering mothers, the narrative begins with William defying his mother by leaving to visit his lover, spurring his mother to

[8] Between 1790 and 1830 many important recordings of orally transmitted sources were made (including those in Scott's curation); it was Harvard professor Child who compiled from these the 'definitive thesaurus of British popular ballads', gathering 305 individual titles, with some of these in 'as many as 25 versions' (Brogan, 1994, p. 23).

[9] In his headnotes, Child strives to track the complex genealogy of the ballads, including the various sources from which each version, A through C, is compiled. Also noted are elements shared with or extracted from different ballads, including an Italian one (2014, pp. 185–6).

curse him: ‘My malisen drown ye!’ (A.6.4).[10] After fording the Clyde, William knocks at Margaret’s door and begs for shelter. A voice from within denies him entry, so William turns back and the maternal curse is fulfilled when the Clyde waters sweep him from his horse and drown him. Margaret wakes from a dream in which her ‘true-love Willie / was staring at [her] bed-feet’ (A.14.5–6). Margaret’s mother admits that William had in fact been at the door, and her treachery in turning him away is made explicit in Margaret’s dialogue:

> ‘You’ve had a cruel mither, Willie,
> And I have had anither;
> But we shall sleep in the Clyde’s water
> Like sister and like brither.’ (C.29)

In both A and C, Margaret’s promise is fulfilled when she runs after William and drowns with him in the Clyde’s ‘deepest pot’ (C.28.3).

Like ‘Edward’, ‘The Mother’s Malison, or, Clyde’s Waters’, is characteristic of the traditional folk ballad; according to *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, this form preserves ‘traces of the archaic modes of preliterature’ in which ‘[p]lot is the central element’, and focuses on a ‘single crucial episode’ with the action ‘directed toward its catastrophe’ (Brogan, 1994, p. 22). McCready’s revisionist poem is set *after* the catastrophe, inhabiting the emotional afterlife of the original ‘Clyde’s Waters’, and employs a slower metrical pace reflective of the stasis of grief now afflicting the ballad’s personae. There are, however, direct points of contact with No. 216, as in May Margaret’s spectral address to drowned William:

> You had a witch for a mother, William,
> I did too.
> So now together we lie
> in Clyde’s water
> like brother and like sister.[11] (*May Margaret*, sec. 4, st. 5)

[10] Excerpts are identified by the variant’s letter, then stanza and line number: ie. ‘“F.1.4” refers to variant F, stanza 1, line 4’ – example per Håvard Nørjordet’s reference system (2005, p. 26).

[11] Margaret’s simile may simply be a stock image describing familial (unconsummated) affection. It might also, if I may hazard a guess, suggest a secret reason for the mothers’ combined efforts to keep the lovers apart – to prevent unwitting incest.

Stock formulas and limited figures of speech typify folk ballads, with 'repetition and parallelism' serving to create cumulative effects; the compressed focus allows little space for character development, but dialogue is a means by which different points of view are rendered, and, further, as noted in *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, 'Such speeches are sparingly tagged: frequently we must deduce the speaker from what is being said' (Brogan, 1994, p. 22).

In her rendition of 'Clyde's Water', McCready uses polyphony and vivid imagery to modernise the form. Introspective first-person points of view revolve through segments tagged as interior monologues; in the first of these, 'Mother's Malison', we are privy to the mother's 'mind of autumn' as she describes casting her spell, the sympathetic magic of running a bath at the same moment her son is drowning. In this alternate literary history, McCready supplies the speaker's motivation as fear rather than interference prompting her ill-tidings: 'How could I tell him not to go? How could I tell him I saw it in a dream?' (sec. 5. st. 4).

McCready's application of simile and metaphor is another distinctive break from the limited figures of speech that typify traditional folk ballads. Imagistic echoes of Sylvia Plath's 1960 'Tulips' recurs throughout 'Clyde's Water', as in the first mother's lament:

> My William lies dead.
> His thick hair floating on the Clyde
> is a bouquet of black tulips growing
> out of the river. (Mother's Malison, sec. 3, st. 1)

McCready announces another debt, to a Spanish poet, in the ballad's dedication 'After Lorca'. Depictions of drowned children and lovers, an artistic propensity dubbed the Ophelia complex by Gaston Bachelard, is a 'motif [that] makes constant appearances in the poetry of Federico García Lorca' (Browning, 2013, p. 73). The extract from 'Clyde's Water' cited above also summons various representations of Shakespeare's heroine as a drowned body surrounded by flowers.[12] One final example of intertextuality in 'Clyde's Water' illustrates a submerged narrative running through McCready's oeuvre that Mark Burnhope identifies as

[12] Daphne A. Browning (2013) notes one of the most well-known of such renderings by Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais, his 'Ophelia' painted between 1851 and 1852, is 'a perfect depiction of the Ophelia complex; the dying maiden is suspended on the surface of the water, surrounded by flowers and foliage' (p. 75).

'a subtle but palpable motif of birth and miscarriage' (2011, para. 2). These are prevailing themes in McCready's 2017 collection *Madame Ecosse*; in her Clyde ballad, the motif appears in a Scottish nursery song that serves as a refrain, recited here by May Margaret's grieving mother:

> I dress a doll in your baby clothes,
>
> white bonnet, mittens —
> sit it on my knee.
>
> *Greetin' for a wee bawbee,*
> *Tae buy some Coulter's candy.* (Mother's Deception, sec. 3, st. 3-5).

From the personal – McCready's 'Clyde's Water' – to the political – Graham's 'Aauld Maalie' – these two ballad adaptations demonstrate the thematic versatility of traditional Scottish ballads when used as scaffolding by contemporary poets. These examples also parallel the range of formal approaches taken by the poets under discussion in the critical chapters of this thesis, a trajectory illustrated by Graham's fidelity to the stanza form and Scots dialect of 'Edward', to McCready's radical rewrite of 'The Clyde Waters' as a sequence of imagistic free verse monologues.

The first poet under consideration in the thesis is Scottish-American Helen Adam, whose innovations on the ballad nevertheless hew to the rhyme, assonance, refrains, and short-lined metrical patterns of the traditional Scottish works she draws upon. Chronologically following Adam, in date of birth and period of publication, is Stephen Scobie, whose long free-verse ballad abandons the formal structures of the ballad but stays true to the spirit of its folk narrative. Like Adam, Scobie demonstrates a fidelity to the same pool of originary sources, including those systematically catalogued by Child, that I have identified in the Graham and McCready examples. While the ballads of Adam and Scobie do not so recognisably wear 'worn features of ancestral mould', they share traits with what *The New Princeton Handbook* terms 'pieces dealing with the pagan supernatural, like "Tam Lin"' (Brogan, 1994, p. 23).

The imitations, or adaptations, by Adam and Scobie lay the ground for the third chapter, a survey of Arctic poetry by Scottish and Canadian poets written between the 18th and 21st centuries. Here, the starting points – in addition to the obligatory polar Gothic

ur-text, Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* – are Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1798 supernatural ballad, 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', and Scottish-Canadian gold prospector and poet Robert Service's 1907 mock-Gothic ballad, 'The Cremation of Sam McGee', which is set in Canada's far north. This chapter traces how an aesthetic of the icy sublime in *Frankenstein* and 'Rime' – Coleridge's poem itself a product of artistic imitation, as noted above – is relayed into contemporary poetry set in Arctic landscapes, inspiring an ecoGothic poetics that leaves the folk ballad tradition behind, but nonetheless references back to its earlier inheritors such as Coleridge.

Heterotopias

These short explications of the McCready and Graham ballad adaptations offers a preview of my approach in Chapters 1 through 3; in my readings, I focus on historical context, artistic milieu, literary influences and intertextuality, as well as on the thematic content and tropes used in each poem, with an emphasis on narrative choices rather than prosody or form. The two sample ballads above also serve as exemplars of a key concept informing this thesis, the Foucauldian heterotopia. In a 1967 lecture, later published as *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1986, trans. Jay Miskowiec), Michel Foucault proposes the term *heterotopology* for understanding the 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live'; this concept is particularly applicable to 'relations among sites' in what he terms our post-nineteenth-century 'epoch of simultaneity': 'the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed' (pp. 23–24). There are two main types of space, Foucault suggests – utopias, 'fundamentally unreal spaces' with 'no real place'– as opposed to heterotopias, real places that exist 'within the culture [and] are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted' (p. 24).

Heterotopology categorises these juxtapositions under six principles, and in 'Aald Maalie's' overwriting of 'Edward', an archaic Scots ballad of no fixed address, we have an instance of the first, which is a heterotopia of 'crisis' or 'deviation'. Foucault provides as examples of this principle 'psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons' (1986, p. 25). To these heterotopias of incarceration and punishment, I would add execution sites. The ground on which Lollie Graham erects his gibbet, Gallow Hill, is both a real place, a headland where people hike and sheep graze, and simultaneously a historic site of communal capital punishment. In McCready's 'Clyde's Water', we have an instance related to Foucault's

second principle of heterotopology and what he terms 'the strange heterotopia of the cemetery' (1986, p. 25). This principle in turn illuminates an adjunct fourth principle, that heterotopias 'function at full capacity' when they are also *heterochronies* – that is, places 'linked to slices in time', such as the cemetery:

> the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance. (Foucault, 1986, p. 26)

Like 'Aald Maalie', McCready's 'Clyde's Water' references historic events specific to place. May Margaret's declaration, 'I came to the Gantocks to find you, William' (sec. 3, st. 1), alludes to a hazardous outcropping of rocks in the Firth of Clyde, the site of numerous shipwrecks (including one in 1956 that claimed three lives). The river Clyde, in both the original ballad collected by Child and in McCready's version, with its submerged wrecks and drowned bodies, is a literal and literary heterochrony. McCready's ballad traffics in imagery imported from Anglo American and Spanish poems that depict psychic drownings and watery graves, and among its multitude of voices are those of the dead, who, per Foucault's heterochrony, represent an 'absolute break with their traditional time' (1986, p. 26).[13]

'Aald Maalie' and 'Ballad of the Clyde's Water' are Scottish poems by Scottish poets, set in Scotland (incidentally, the places in Scotland where my parents grew up, Shetland and Glasgow). The first two chapters in this thesis consider what happens when you take the poet out of Scotland, but don't take Scotland out of the poem. In Chapter 1, in Helen Adam's *Miss Laura*, for instance, America's Savannah River as a Gothic site of death is informed by ballads about the Clyde; here, the river is a heterochrony representing the unrestful place of her lover's interment. In Chapter 2, my reading of Stephen Scobie's *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* identifies a Foucauldian heterotopia at play in the fairyland wherein the poem is set – an otherworldly realm contiguous with the utopian – and therefore unreal – notion of Canada held by the Orcadian migrant labourers recruited to work there.

[13] In Plath's 'Tulips', an extended metaphor of drowning is depicted in the hospitalised speaker's own bodily sensations, and in her description of how 'the air snags and eddies round [the vase of tulips] the way a river / Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine' (1992, st. 8). This echo is evident in McCready's 'Clyde's Water', where 'the river is a hospital corridor, swinging doors without end' (2018, Mother's Malison, sec. 4, st. 2).

The fulcrum of the thesis occurs in Chapter 3, where the focus of my research shifts from immigrants to effects. Here, the poems surveyed are set in Canada's northernmost archipelagos, and follow a loose chronology beginning in 1818 – the year *Frankenstein was* first published, and the year the Scottish Officer John Ross undertook the first of the British Admiralty's exploratory voyages in search of a Northwest Passage, a route that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The Arctic maze resisted these attempts, including Franklin's expedition in which his ships were famously lost. The poems under discussion depict the Arctic as a sublime Gothic space, and I argue that the landscape's resistance to human emplacement illustrates the fifth principle of heterotopias, 'a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them permeable' (Foucault, 1986, p. 26).

The poetry sequence of Part 3, my practice-based research titled *Effects*, is set in a Siberian arctic landscape of melting permafrost where mammoth-tusk hunters dig up the corpses of ice-age animals; these necrofields, where the prehistoric past is displaced into the present, are the ultimate heterochrony, a vast graveyard illustrative of the Foucauldian fourth principle, 'where men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time' (1986, p. 26). The events that unfold in the final sequence of poems, a journey up an unnamed Siberian river, bear faint traces of Child's ballad No. 216, 'The Mother's Malison, or, Clyde's Water'– yet another instance of a Scottish ballad of 'ancestral mould' resurfacing in a poem of the present moment.

David Punter (1996) has observed in *The Literature of Terror* that

> Within the Gothic, we can find a very intense, if displaced, engagement with political and social problems, the difficulty of negotiating those problems being precisely reflected in the Gothic's central stylistic conventions. (p. 54)

This confluence of displacements, generic and historical, finds its apogee in the ecoGothic. I have mentioned before the function of nostalgia in the poetries of displacement by Helen Adam and Stephen Scobie. Nostalgia, as Derek Gladwin (2018) explains, is a psychic dislocation in which a 'person lives in two separate geographical locations simultaneously, while only physically inhabiting one of those spaces' (p. 42). In Chapter 3, I argue that our conception of an icy sublime must evolve as the climate changes. Evident in the contemporary ecoGothic poetry discussed in that chapter and in my own manuscript, a different 'symptom' of displacement is at play – the phenomenon of solastalgia. As Gladwin

explains the distinction, nostalgia describes a longing to be back 'home', whereas solastalgia describes

> the condition in which a person lives in *one* geographical location, but with the lived experience of desolation and dislocation, despite still being at home, due to how that geographical space has been altered through environmental degradation.
> (2018, p. 42).

Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland (2019) identify a parallel distinction between Gothic and ecoGothic. Their illustrative proposition might serve as an overture to my own attempt to Gothicise a poetics of displacement:

> One: You are lost in a wood. Now survive.
> Two: The planet you think you live on no longer exists. Now survive. (p. 1)

This unnervingly plausible scenario conjures scenes of floods, fires, rogue waves, atmospheric rivers, melting glaciers and other climate-induced catastrophes. It conjures the acrid taste and choking air of forest fire smoke drifting across the ocean from Washington State to Vancouver Island, where my home is, a thick fall of ash coating rooftops and cars in driveways. To return to Foucault, his theory that heterotopias serve as counter sites to utopias – those perfect yet unreal spaces – is further elaborated by the idea of a 'between' site, the 'mixed, joint experience' of the mirror. The mirror is another type of utopia, for it is 'a placeless place'; it is also a space where the self is 'reconstituted' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). This suggestive notion prompts me to revisit Parker and Poland's solastalgic erasure of Earth as home – an utmost *unheimlich* – and to reframe my original question as both a conclusion to this introduction, and a threshold: Who am I *here*?

Chapter 1: Helen Adam's Flute of Splintered Bone: The Performance of Scottish Gothic

Blending with terrors wild, and legends drear,
The charmed minstrelsy of mystic sound,
That rous'd, embodied, to the eye of Fear
The unearthly habitants of faery ground.

'Prologue', Anne Bannerman (1802)

Born in Glasgow in 1909, Scottish poet Helen Douglas Adam emigrated from England to America with her sister and mother in 1939, becoming 'trapped' while visiting New York at the outbreak of World War Two in Europe. However, as Dorothy McMillan (2019) suggests, this entrapment would prove to be a serendipitous release, an unplanned displacement that would shape Adam's work (pp. 8,10). The family of three moved to San Francisco in 1949 (Adam's father, the Reverend Douglas Adam, was by this time deceased, killed in a freak sports accident).[14] Thus Adam's career as a poet began anew, as she took part in San Francisco's avant-garde literary scene and performed her incantatory ballads at poetry readings. Brenda Knight (1996) chronicles Adam's role in the San Francisco poetry community as that of a 'Bardic Matriarch' who was 'counted among its elders' as an important precursor of the Beat Generation (pp. 10–13).[15] Adam was also instrumental in the formation of 'The Maidens' in 1957, a 'magical poetry and performance salon' attended by poet-friends Robert Duncan, Madeline Gleason, and James Broughton, among others (Knight, 1996, p. 12). As Knight puts it, 'San Francisco in the 1950's could not have been a more perfect place to reinvent herself' (1996, p. 10).

In the role of a poet-seer, whose performances of rhymed, Scots-inflected ballads set her apart from her younger, mostly male, free-verse writing American peers, Adam was someone 'other', out of place and out of time. According to Michael Davidson (1989):

[14] Douglas Adam died when a golf ball struck him in the head, an irony not lost on Helen, who recalled her father's obsession with the game in an interview (n. date, cited in Prevallet, 2007, p. 10).

[15] 'Beat' was a 'countercultural phenomenon' in twentieth-century America; the term was coined by writer Herbert Huncke to describe the '"exalted exhaustion" of a life lived beyond the edge', and expanded upon by Jack Kerouac and Allen to describe both the 'Beat Generation' and a conceptual 'beatific' with a spiritual aspect 'invoking Catholicism, William Blake, and Buddhism, respectively' (Knight, 1996, p. 2).

> If she was an original in her revival of the English ballad tradition, she was the absolute incarnation of that spirit in her performances, singing or chanting her songs in a high, strong voice that had retained its Gaelic lilt. Her willingness to 'sing' her songs provided the impetus for many local poets to try, with various degrees of success and voice, to do likewise. (p. 180)

Helen Adam's performance of Scottish Gothic balladry in the context of the San Francisco Renaissance and the Beats might seem a calculated cultural oddity. Indeed, McMillan conjectures that:

> Adam was not unaware of her oddness; she may indeed have felt that her best advertisement was the uncomfortable combination of the dark horrors of her verses and the afternoon-tea appearance of their creator, reader, and chanter. (2019, p. 8)

This canny self-exotification (or tartan-isation) is a blend of authenticity and performativity. As Ian Brown (2020) notes:

> all enactments of identity with any mythic power […] are manufactured – in a sense false and bogus – usually with more than one purpose embodied in their creation. In that creative manufacture lies their richness and complexity. If there is one element that can be said to mark Scottishness […] it is such hybridity and contestation of identities, the crossing and interpenetration of boundaries. (p. 143)

As I will argue, Adam's purposeful reworking of archaic Scottish poetic conventions reveals a sensibility alert to the sexual and racial politics of mid-century America. This chapter gives close consideration to two poems that particularly demonstrate Adam's attention to these specific themes – the former evident in 'Naked in the Ditches', its events unfolding in a feminist wild zone, and the latter in *Miss Laura*, set in a Southern Gothic heterotopia of racial segregation. Both poems bear vestigial traces of Scotland, with literary and historical elements from a reified old country displaced onto reimagined locales. Helen Adam's reinvention of her Gothic poetics amid the San Francisco Renaissance is manifested in performance and practice, and, in this chapter, I trace the trajectory of her career, the development of her poetic persona into a post-Romantic Gothic visionary, and how the 'faery ground' of her homeland is reconstituted in a twentieth-century American imaginary.

Pixy Pool

With her younger sister Pat, Helen's life-long companion and sometimes artistic collaborator, Helen Adam was privately educated at the former Seymour Lodge Girls School in Dundee;

she went on to attend Edinburgh University and then worked briefly as a journalist in London before the fated trip to America (McMillan, 2019, p. 8). The daughter of a Presbyterian minister, she was 'practically brought up on the Bible and the border Ballads of Scotland', noting that many of 'the Old Testament stories are like savage ballads in themselves' (Adam, 'A few notes on the uncanny', 2007, p. 352). This educational background and these sources clearly inform the narrative impetus and diction in Adam's poems, the great majority of which are ballads. As Norman Finkelstein (1985) writes, Adam's ballads

> have their roots deep in Scottish tradition, and the situations they describe – lost loves, tragic deaths, ghostly encounters and ecstatic visions – are familiar to anyone who has ever browsed through a collection of medieval and Renaissance poems. (p. 125)

This chapter's epigraph, excerpted from the sonnet titled 'Prologue' that introduces Edinburgh poet Ann Bannerman's 1802 *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*, could serve as a prospectus for the Gothic mode of Helen Adam's own poetic project – to '*[Blend] with terrors wild, and legends drear, The charmed minstrelsy of mystic sound*' (ll. 11–12). Adam's 'modern medievalist tales of witches, possessed knights, and lovely, alluring but deadly women' (Knight, 1996, pp. 10–11), with their indeterminate, exotic, or transhistorical settings, bear superficial similarities to Bannerman's balladry, and it is intriguing to think Bannerman's popular books may have found their way into Helen Adam's library in Scotland.

Whether or not Adam read Bannerman, each assumes a vatic stance in her poetry. As Bannerman's 'Prologue' teases, in the 'caverned recesses' of 'ages past' dwells

> The long-lost Spirit of forgotten times,
> Whose voice prophetic reach'd to distant climes,
> And rul'd the nations from its witched cells;
> That voice is hush'd! (ll. 6–9)

Bannerman acts as a conduit or medium for this muted oracle, positioning herself as 'a kind of prophet in the visionary tradition' (Heilman, 2017, pp. cxii–cxiii).[16] She does so by 'crisscrossing themes and ideas related to the visionary legacy with the tropes and the

[16] Notably sibyl-like personae are depicted in other poems in Bannerman's *Tales of Supersition*, i.e. 'The Prophetess of the Oracle of Seäm' and 'The Dark Ladie'.

trappings of Gothic balladry' (Ruppert, 2013, p. 789); Adam, I will argue, does the same. Timothy Ruppert (2013) distils the spirit of Romanticism's visionary legacy:

> In essence, visionary poetics provides an idea of continuity among authors and texts, a theory of poetic inspiration and a belief that literature can better the world by transforming human thought and spirit through language. The seer-poet takes what he or she knows of the past and makes it speak to the present, so creating new dreams for the future. (p. 785)

That Adam as seer-poet 'creates new dreams for the future' is a point made below in my analysis of *Miss Laura's* debt to Blake; Adam, like Bannerman, is what Ruppert would term a (post) 'Romantic *vates*' (p. 784).

While acknowledging 'the oral tradition [of] early nineteenth century poets' such as 'Burns and Scott' among Adam's 'formal precursors', Finkelstein likewise identifies the influence of the Romantics in Adam – 'Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, and […] W.B. Yeats' (1985, pp. 126–27). That nineteenth-century oral tradition, codified as an antique Scots vernacular in many Adam ballads (and an example of the Scots immigrant 'enactments of identity' described by Brown), is both 'put on' and true to Adam's voice – narrative undercurrents of the old Scottish ballads 'Tam Lin' and 'The Clyde's Waters' are also evident in 'Naked in the Ditches' and *Miss Laura*, respectively. The Romantic revisionism of Blake, et al, where 'the simple oral forms and tragic or fantastic themes of the folk ballad are refined' (Finklestein, p. 127), is further modernised in Adam's application of the Gothic to contemporary themes – Adam, like Milton (whose Satan is 'the original Romantic hero'), is, as Finkelstein suggests, 'firmly of the devil's party' (1985, p. 127).

In Adam's first published writing there is evidence of such an alignment. As Kristin Prevallet (2007) observes, these early works 'flirt with the dark side and foreshadow' Adam's later poetry (p. 6). As a prodigy who published three books by the age of twenty, an affinity for form is also evident in her earliest work. Her mother served as her amanuensis, recording the child Helen's first recited rhymes soon after she started talking – verse that in an interview Adam would later come to describe as 'dreadful doggerel' (*Blaze* interview, 2007, p. 349). Adam's first book, *The Elfin Pedlar and Tales Told by Pixy Pool*, published in the UK in 1923 and the USA in 1924, was a collection of poems she had composed between the ages of 'four and twelve' (Monroe, 1924, p. 279). In a contemporary review of *The Elfin*

Pedlar in *Poetry* magazine, Harriet Monroe described Adam as a 'wonder-child', whose work belongs to 'the old' period of poetry:

> [n]ot only because Helen loves rhyme and tinkling iambs […], but still more because Helen's pretty facility always echoes familiar tunes. Helen has a charming childish fancy which lightly follows the trodden paths. (1924, pg. 279)

One such piece of juvenilia, which Monroe cites as the 'prettiest poem' with the 'most depth', bears the nascent seeds of a Gothic corpus inclined to dark imagery and twist endings; that poem is 'Night', 'written when [Adam] was four or five' (Monroe, 1924, p. 279):

> Night came sighing,
> And all around was still;
> The crimson day lay dying
> Behind the farthest hill.
>
> I saw an angel
> With a snow-white flower,
> And he pulled the petals off
> Hour by hour. (ll. 1–8)

In this 'pretty' little poem, the speaker's visionary stance – 'I saw an angel' – is both precocious and predictive of works to come.[17] That shock of malice inherent in the angel's petal pulling is an effect Adam will reprise, reusing the image in the 1980 poem 'Naked in the Ditches': 'The briars plucked off my costly clothes / Like petals of a daisy, Oh!' (st. 9, ll. 1–2). The ending with its unexpected twist is yet another hallmark of Adam's adult work.

The Elfin Pedlar was reprinted in 1925 as *Charms and Dreams from the Elfin Pedlar's Pack*. In 1929, during Adam's time at the University of Edinburgh, her collection *Shadow of the Moon* appeared, with a similar prosodic style but risqué content in which 'the lighter themes of nature […] became transformed into tales of desire, bondage, black magic and supernatural possession' (Prevallet, 2007, p. 11). Her poetry collection this time around did not meet universally sympathetic reviews.[18] Adam sought to distance herself from these early works and the notoriety that came with them – according to Knight, some 'spooked and

[17] Monroe is comparing Adam's work to another child poet, the American Hilda Conkling, who 'belongs to the new period' of 'fresher rhymes' (1924, p. 279).

[18] Prevallet cites William Rose Benet's criticism that *Shadow of the Moon* lacks 'individuality' and 'maturity of melody and diction' (2007, p. 8).

superstitious Scots considered her everything from a reincarnated bard to a witch's changeling' (1996, p. 9). She did not publish again until thirty years later, when she had escaped 'the attention her prodigality had brought her in Scotland' by emigrating to America (p. 10). However – as my readings of 'Naked in the Ditches' and *Miss Laura* will demonstrate – Adam would continue to hew to the 'trodden paths' of poetry in a cultural milieu that fostered her revitalization of the ballad form.

Nurse of enchantment

Helen Adam's mentor and friend the poet Robert Duncan (2016), regarding the transportive effects of the rhythmic power of her work, observes that 'her ballads take place in an other place' and 'an other time':

> That other 'Scotland', the invisible World and Its phantasy, is the proper scene of these passion-possessed lovers and haters of Helen Adam's lore as it was the proper scene of [the witch-cult] who sought their hideous raptures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (p. 66)

In 1954, at the age of 45, Adam met Duncan when attending his workshop in San Francisco, where she 'baffled and amused' the 'nest of rebels' (Michael McClure's term for his colleagues) by reciting William Blake from memory (Prevallet, 2007, p. 18). Some of her classmates recalled 'a sudden lightning storm that cast the room in an eerie light as she read' (Prevallet, 2007, p. 18). Carl Grundberg, in his introduction to her 1982 collection *Songs with Music*, describes an Adam reading 'amid the exploding modernist aesthetic of the San Francisco poetry renaissance'; the sophisticated audience was 'subdued' and 'borne away like babies by fairies' by the 'primordial […] spell' of her recitation (2007, p. 379). In an obituary for Adam written in 1993, Maureen Owen identifies this primordial element at play in Adam's presentation: the eccentric attire, the swaying and 'eerie intonations' summoning a ritualistic aura, as if she were engulfed in a 'leaping fire, a deep glad of mist', her captive audience 'cast suddenly on a wide and desolate plain full of howling and nervous hoofbeats' (2007, p. 381).

These hyperbolic accounts serve as reminders that Adam's performative mode reaches back to saga literature and shamanistic practice, belonging to traditions identified by Nora Chadwick in her 1942 study *Poetry and Prophecy*. Chadwick notes a functional pairing of poetry and music in the early Norse sagas, where 'the seeress who is called in to give an

oracle' needs 'a singer *with a good voice* to chant the required spells' to summon 'the spirits' (p. 8). The image of Adam as a shamanistic figure resembles Chadwick's emphasis on the importance of the performance itself in Siberian shamanism:

> The aesthetic value of the seer's art is not lost on the audience. […] When an Altai shaman is reciting not a sound escapes from his audience; their pipes go out, their eyes are riveted on the shaman, and for a long time after he has ceased to speak no one moves. All are spell-bound. (1942, p. 47)

Underlying the cultivation of these effects is a shrewd self-awareness at play; as Owen notes, Adam 'could make a contemporary audience believe in shape shifting and doom', all while 'taking irony's backseat to the fray' (2007, p. 381).

Pointing to the 'the tyrannical insistence of the Devil's beat' as a 'pulse' through which the ballad performer 'subject[s] the listening intelligence to the story's spell', Duncan sees Adam's revival of the form as a tonic, which 'in our age of increasing aesthetic inhibition has all the force of the return of the repressed' (2016, p. 65). Duncan links this ancient 'beat', quite literally, to the Beat Generation, dubbing Adam a 'Nurse of Enchantment' (n.d., cited in Prevallet, 2007, p. 20).[19] In his biographical note in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry 1945–1960*, Duncan attributes Adam's anachronistic Gothic ballads with being the 'missing link' between Romanticism and contemporary poetry (cited in Duncan, 2007, p. 325). Duncan's subsequent 'reinvestigation' of William Blake presages a wider renewed interest in Blake as a mystic visionary in the American poetry scene of the New Age 1970's. To what extent Adam may have influenced others to revisit Blake is impossible to gauge. Of note, however, is that one of her poems, alongside the work of Duncan and more than a hundred other poets, artists and essayists, appears in Bogan and Goss's massive 1982 posthumous *festschrift* titled *Sparks of Fire: Blake in a New Age*.[20]

Despite believing that she herself didn't possess the gift of second sight – though her mother did – Adam held that the poet's role was that of a visionary, saying, 'I do think there is a definite link between the vision of poets and a belief in the supernatural' (Packard

[19] Grateful for their shared affinity for Shelley and Blake, Duncan characterised Adam and himself as 'antiques […] of the 19th century' (correspondence, 1955, cited in Prevallet, 2007, p. 301).

[20] The poem, an uncharacteristically pensive and brief lyric, is titled 'A Young Girl's Rhyme', perhaps a nod to *Songs of Innocence* (1982, p. 8).

interview, 2007, p. 337). When asked in the same interview about Blake's visions, she stated, 'Blake wasn't mad, he simply was living in the real world in which he saw into the astral world' (p. 337). A vantage point from the margins was privileged with special knowledge, as expressed in 'After Listening to Allen Ginsberg', a poem written in 1956 as a response to Ginsberg's performance of 'Howl':

> Let that prophet of beauty
> Live with ugliness.
> The wise may see
> From the city dump
> The world of Blake,
> The blazing sunflower. (ll. 18- 23)

The poem was also a response to members of Ginsberg's audience who walked out of his reading and later attacked him for writing 'garbage'; Adam bristled at the insult but adopted it as a poetic ethos to 'never to feel superior to [garbage]' (Prevallet, 2007, p. 26). As Prevallet puts it, 'After Listening to Allen Ginsberg' is both 'homage and a bold declaration of the poetics [Adam] would attempt to embrace' (2007, p. 27). Adam's later poems are populated with cheerless junkies, wicked prostitutes, jealous husbands and man-eating women, and her depictions of human frailty and cruelty in some of her most memorable ballads are proofs of an undaunted attempt to embrace in her writing the 'ugliness' of life.[21]

This manifesto – 'Let that prophet of beauty / Live with ugliness' – is baldly expressed in a wicked little two-stanza poem called 'The Small One' published in 1966 (*Magazine*, p. 16). The speaker, self-described as tiny enough to balance on a human thumb but possessed of an immense crouching shadow, announces their purpose, which is to bring back news of the Underworld:

> From the profound abyss
> I am returned to tell
> For ears attuned to truth
> The secrets of deep Hell. (ll. 1-4)

It is a simple, if somewhat overdetermined, declaration of intent, and confirms Finkelstein's correctness in placing Adam among the devil's party, possessed of what he terms an

[21] Francis B. Gummere notes that in balladry '[t]he worst stories […] come directly from life, and ballad or tale simply follows fact' (1907 cited in Wimberley 1965, p. 8).

'insistent visionary bent' (1985, p. 127). As 'Naked in the Ditches' and *Miss Laura* attest, Adam is indeed willing to venture into dark places.

'Naked in the Ditches'

'Naked in the Ditches' (henceforth 'Ditches') narrates the supernatural seduction by a 'wild witch hare' of a young bridegroom as he heads to church to marry for money a woman he doesn't love (st. 1–2). Typical of fairyland abductions in Scottish ballads such as *Tam Lin* or *Thomas the Rhymer*, the young man 'has no strength to turn aside' from nuns who moonlight as witches (st. 2, l. 7). The poem goes on to describe an 'unholy' pagan wedding feast presided over by a Black Goat, where the bridegroom is made to 'celebrate King Oberon / With matings round the altar, Oh!' (st.5, l. 7):

> On heathen hillocks I was wed,
> The cry of church bells scorning, Oh!
> A bonfire was our marriage bed,
> And there we burned till morning, Oh!
> My bride she was a Princess rare,
> And then a punching coal-black hare! (st.7, ll. 1–6)

The groom himself changes from man to hare and back again, that rapid metamorphosis another fairy ballad trope. In Adam's poem, however, there is no repatriation to the mundane world, and after chasing the hare for nine days and nights around a henge of standing stones, the man succumbs, crazed and broken but still enchanted:

> A second life I'd give to share
> The loves of those wild witches, Oh!
> Although they've left me torn and bare,
> Stark naked in the ditches, Oh! (st.11, ll. 5–8)

This concluding stanza could describe any destructive addiction; here it is sexual desire, meted out as punishment for the bridegroom's pride and cold heart. He literally loses his shirt in this pursuit, forfeiting – like any good fairy tale abductee – what Cindy McMann (2012) calls 'the markers of his status in the human world' (p. 257).

McMann observes that, in the manner the sabbat witches are also nuns and hares, the ceremonial occult in 'Ditches' is cobbled together from a 'multiplicity of sources':

> the witches appeal not to a pagan god, but to 'King Oberon,' signifying that their allegiances lie not within a particular cosmology, but within the realm of the imagination. The appeal to Shakespeare's king of the fairies, himself derived from various medieval sources, emphasizes the extent to which the world of the poem exceeds religious structures. (2012, p. 257)

The world of the poem evinces its own artifice, then, a performative making in which magic is a literary construct that draws on Adam's evident knowledge and practice of arcane spell craft and esoteric magic.[22] I note, also, that the diabolical sabbat and the witches' ability to transform themselves into hares is strikingly reminiscent of the coerced testimony of Scottish woman Isabel Gowdie at her 1647 trial for witchcraft. In her confession, in which she reports the unholy grace her coven offers before 'eat[ing] meat in the Devil's name', Gowdie divulges the spell for turning oneself into a hare and back again: 'I shall go into a hare', and, to undo the charm, 'I am in a hare's likeness just now / But I shall be in a woman's likeness even now' (Cawthorne, 2019, p. 214). In 'Ditches', Adam recreates (and embellishes) this historical Scottish sabbat, and reuses Gowdie's actual – or desperately invented – transformation spell: 'A hare! A girl! A girl! A hare!' (st.7, l. 7).

Young Helen's juvenilia, simple rhymes featuring birds, angels and fairies, has been transformed into savage balladry with the 'authentically Scottish' feeling Adam so admires in *Macbeth* (Packard interview, 2007, p. 336).[23] Her nonhuman creatures have now become actors in a carnal morality play, staged on 'heathen hillocks' reminiscent of the bleakly beautiful Scottish (and Shakespearean) landscape where she once walked as a child:

> We used to live close to Duncan's castle, near Inverness, and also near the blasted heath – it's just like any other long low-lying moor, if you didn't know it was the blasted heath. (Packard interview, 2007, p. 336)

In this recollection, Adam inadvertently puts her finger on this place functioning as a heterotopia – what Michel Foucault (1986, trans. Jay Miskowiec) would explain as 'a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well'– a space

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[22] McMann identifies archival evidence of Helen Adam's adherence to 'rationalist occult systems': 'Even in her own papers, Adam emphasizes the intricacies of casting circles, noting the precise locations for figures and symbols and the wordings that must go with each' (Adam n.d., box 21, cited in McMann, 2012, p. 257).

[23] In the interview, Adam praises *Macbeth's* 'magnificent' and 'authentically Scottish' feeling: 'the savage revenge and the courage and the wildness and the black magic all through it' (2007, p. 336).

'simultaneously mythic and real' (pp. 23–24). This conceptual staging plays out in Adam's poetics. In 'Ditches', the ordinary world of 'church bells' and 'flowery branches' is simultaneously the domain of the 'wild witch hares', a parallel realm revealed to the groom as he comes upon their 'surprising dances' after entering a 'hushed' 'grove' (st.1–2). Such transportive crossings are typical of Scottish folklore, and to trespass upon fairy localities such as a magic wood or sacred grove 'makes one liable to capture by Otherworld beings' (Wimberley, 1965, p. 314).[24] Adam has married the elfin knight of 'Tam Lin' with a contemporary folk horror outsider who finds himself the ceremonial offering in a Satanic bacchanal.[25]

Published just a year before Elaine Showalter's (1986) revolutionary 1981 essay 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', 'Ditches' reads like a case study for an anthropological model of women's culture that Showalter identified as having 'implications for current feminist literary theory' (p. 346). In this structural model, proposed by Shirley and Edwin Ardener in the early 1970's, 'women constitute a muted group […] whose culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, the dominant (male) group' (Showalter, 1986, p. 346). These groups are represented by intersecting circles:

> Much of muted circle Y falls within the boundaries of dominant circle X; there is also a crescent of Y which is outside the dominant boundary and therefore (in Ardener's terminology) 'wild'. We can think of the 'wild zone' of women's culture spatially, experientially, or metaphysically. Spatially it stands for an area which is literally no-man's-land, a place forbidden to men, which corresponds to the zone in X which is off limits to women. […] But if we think of the wild zone metaphysically, or in terms of consciousness, it has no corresponding male space since all of male consciousness is within the circle of the dominant structure […]. In this sense, the 'wild' is always imaginary. (Showalter, 1986, p. 347)

The 'heathen hillocks' of 'Ditches' comprise a specific Gothic heterotopia, a muted female space signified by its 'hushed' grove. This wild zone is stealthily set within the wider culture of men, the dominant culture of the 'cold' hearted bridegroom, whose 'gilded hose, and golden shoon' mark his status (st.1).

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[24] See Chapter 2 for more background on the tradition of *Tam Lin* and Otherworld abductees.

[25] As Bannerman wrote, preemptively defending her own license in 'The Prophecy of Merlin' by marking the Scottish imaginary as a creative common, 'it is all fairy-ground, and a poetical community of right to its appropriation has never been disputed' (1802, p. 144n.).

The depiction of the events in ‘Ditches’ harkens back to the fairy-tale plot of ‘Tam Lin’, Child ballad No. 39, in which a young woman trespasses into a wood guarded by Tam Lin, whose right-of-way and ownership she contests. The cost of entry is ‘her maidenhead’ (A.1.3–4):

> Why pu’s thou the rose, Janet,
> And why breaks thou the wand?
> Or why comes thou to Carterhaugh
> Withoutten my command? (39.A.6)

The sexual encounter – which ranges from seduction to rape in the various iterations of ‘Tam Lin’ – results in the woman’s pregnancy. The ‘flowery branches’ and ‘petal pulling’ in ‘Tam Lin’ allude both to her defiant act of pulling roses, and to her use of a natural abortifacient:

> ‘So do not pluck that flower, lady,
> That has these pimples gray;
> They would destroy the bonny babe
> That we’ve got in our play.’ (D.10)

The plucking of flowers also symbolises a virgin’s defloration. Typically, the elfin knight must affect his return to human form with the aid of the woman: ‘And then I’ll be your ain true-love, / I’ll turn a naked knight’ (A.35.1–2). In ‘Ditches,’ the stripping of the groom’s ‘petals’, followed by the rape imagery that ends the poem, is Adam’s textual retribution; in a stunning inversion, the witches leave him ‘torn and bare, / stark naked in the ditches’ (st.11, ll. 7–8).

Monstrous feminine

Despite serving as a ‘good witch and medium for the Duncan-Spicer circle’, Helen Adam was different from her free verse peers, othered not only by age and nationality, but also by 1950’s sexism (Davidson, 1989, p. 174). According to Davidson: ‘The Beat ethos relegated women to the role of sexual surrogate, muse, or mom; it did not raise them to a position of artistic equality (1989, p. 175). Robert Duncan himself acknowledged these gendered roles: ‘We were the champions of the boys' team in Poetry [in which] there were star players, bench sitters, and water boys’ – women were permitted to play, but were still ‘girls’ assigned roles such as making posters, while ‘Helen Adam was team godmother’ (cited in Davidson, 1989, pp. 175–76).

Davidson speculates that Adam's revival of 'variations on stock romantic figures' is representative of a feminist revisionist impetus during a period in which '[women's] work was performed within [and against] male-centered circles in the San Francisco milieu' (1989, p. 198). Situating Adam's poetry within contemporary feminist theory, in which 'the monster represents woman's independence and creativity' in opposition to the domestic muse, Davidson notes it is that apposite figure

> – the woman as demon or monster – that Helen Adam exploits for her own purposes. Like Mary Shelley before her, Adam's Gothicism is a stylistic frame in which an allegory of creativity is figured and manipulated. (1989, p. 181)

Adam herself was circumspect about the monstrous women populating her poetry. In an undated interview, conducted sometime after Adam's return to New York in 1965, Adam responded to an observation that the women in many of her ballads are predators by musing about the Goddess Kali and the creative aspect of destruction, before moving on to practicalities: 'But I really don't know why almost all the women in my ballads are demons. I guess because it's dramatic' (*Blaze* interview, 2007, p. 346).

Cindy McMann observes a particular streak of bloody-mindedness in the 'stock' female characters populating Adam's poems:

> Adam's women exceed containment both by the masculine figures in her works and by Adam herself. As author, she declines to control her women, refusing to replace them under the governance of some authority figure at the end of their poems. Not only does Adam not condemn them, she allows her 'monstrous' women to create their own value systems, in which freedom and autonomy are the highest ideals. […] Her characters go gleefully unpunished for their crimes because the more heinous crime in Adam's works is for anyone to attempt to place limits on a woman's freedom. (2009, p. 26)

As we have seen, the example of 'Ditches' supports McMann's assessment: the nun/hare/witch women certainly do 'exceed containment', existing in their own wild zone, a realm where the human groom chases but cannot capture them, instead becoming their captive. Fairytale narratives of women sexually possessing, ensnaring, or devouring men appear often in Adam's work – the crimes are indeed heinous, and as McMann observes, usually without consequence. In 'I Love My Love', for instance, the speaker's long hair 'like

a golden monster' pursues and ultimately smothers her lover (p. 65); both 'Song for a Sea Tower' (p. 115) and 'The Fair Young Wife' (p. 123) conclude with a man being eaten by a woman who transforms into a wolf. In the latter, after running with a blood-thirsty wolf-pack, the fair young wife wonders, '"Can I lie down at a husband's will, / When wild love runs, and my heart cries, Kill!"' (st.12, 11. 3–4). Obviously not. In Adam's ballads, women's desires are consummated with consumption, and that is typically where the story ends.

Miss Laura

In one of Adam's earlier poems, however, the female character does get burned for wanton pursuit of her sexual desires. The convergence of a marginalised perspective, second-wave feminism and the repurposing of archaic poetic form is powerfully realised in a 'southern Gothic' ballad titled *Miss Laura*. First published in 1967 as a broadside of 100 copies 'for friends of the poet & the press', *Miss Laura* is the tragic story of a white woman's seduction of her black servant and the terrible consequences that ensue. The woman, careless of the danger posed to the object of her affections, a young Black groom – 'groom' meaning both stableboy and unlawful fiancé – defiantly questions the stigma against interracial relationships:

> 'Black is the colour of my true love's skin.
> White girl, black man, where is the sin?'
>
> Sweet talk murmured by Miss Laura's mouth.
> Lynch fires howling up and down the South!
>
> Up the avenue gentlemen ride.
> Want Miss Laura for their golden bride. (ll. 1–6)

The temporality of *Miss Laura's* narrative is unfixed, and on first reading it seems to harken back to an antebellum south of cotton and tobacco plantations, of gentlemen suitors sipping mint juleps on summer porches – a time prior to the 1865 abolition of legalised slavery across the United States. But the spectre of lynch fires, and the proposition that opens the poem, a question that would have been unutterable in genteel 19th century southern society, situate the poem in a more recent past.[26] After 1865, Jim Crow laws and codes were devised to continue

[26] 'Lynchings were violent public acts that white people used to terrorize and control Black people in the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in the South' (NAACP, 2023, What are Lynchings? para. 2).

the subjugation of African Americans, and in 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled against educational segregation, 'the white backlash' was swift:[27]

> [The] aim was to overturn [the ruling] and maintain segregation forever. Lynchings, which had long plagued Mississippi and the South in general, returned after a four-year hiatus, and those seeking any semblance of black equality quickly became targets. (Anderson, 2015, p. 25).

In this segregationist context, then, Miss Laura's preference of romantic partner is an act of defiance: 'Who will you choose to take to your bed? / "The black boy standing at my horse's head."' (ll. 8–12) As a desirable commodity herself, a 'golden bride' valued for both looks and wealth, Miss Laura provokes the vengeance of the white men who want her for themselves. Society does not permit her to assert her own freedom of choice and bodily autonomy. However, the female temptress here is a prototypical Adam siren; a seducer who dangles the promise of equality, but also, by dint of authority over her male servant, is herself a sexual predator:

> Hear what she whispers in her muted voice,
> And tell me truly if that man had a choice?
> Oh, tell me truly if that man had a choice? (l1. 19–21)

To return briefly to Showalter's discussion of the 'wild zone', Showalter notes that the Ardener model allows for 'muted groups other than women; a dominant structure may determine many muted structures' formed within its 'dominant (white male) tradition'; for instance, sexual and racial politics could create both a 'muted women's culture' and 'a muted black culture' (1986, p. 348). The events of *Miss Laura* occur in the overlap of two muted cultures, and, in relation to her voiceless groom, Miss Laura resides in a circumscribed yet marginally dominant crescent, subsumed within the white male circle of power.

Miss Laura betrays her lover, claiming he forced himself on her, and the young groom is burnt alive by a lynch mob. The remainder of Miss Laura's days are spent mourning beside the Savannah River, speaking to her late beloved with 'a tongue of fire / that must speak passion and can never tire' (ll. 43–44). She is cursed, in other words, in the best ballad sense, and that unstoppable metaphoric 'tongue of fire' suggests an eternal pain that burns both

[27] A Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, ruled in May 1954 that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (Anderson, 2015, p. 25).

ways. Davidson observes that in her ballad revivals Adam progressively transforms tradition to reflect 'contemporary political and social reality':

> Her 'Miss Laura,' for example, is a variation on the English lyric 'Black is the color of my true love's hair,' only in Adam's version 'hair' becomes 'skin,' and the poem becomes a protest against racial prejudice and a plea for understanding in mixed-race relationships. (1989, pg. 183)

Kristin Prevallet sees a rather more retrogressive tendency in Adam's compositions:

> In most of her work, black men (and blackness in general) are unequivocally associated with evil, subterranean forces. [*Miss Laura*] inverts her characteristically (some would say regressive) association of Black with Evil and White with Virtue. (2007, p. 473)

While Adam does employ archetypal symbolism associating 'Blackness with Evil' – i.e. the demonic figure of a 'candle-crowned' 'Black Goat' or bride in the shape of a 'punching coal-black hare' in 'Naked in the Ditches' (st.4, l.7; st.7, l.6) – the idea that Adam unequivocally depicts 'black men' as evil seems overstated, particularly since race and ethnicity are not dominant themes in the majority of her work.[28] Where skin colour does figure, evil attributes are equitably appointed, as in Adam's poem 'Ginger Jack's Warning':

> Ever hear tell how Silk and Luck,
> Lost their way when the lightning struck,
> Met the Devil, and followed him down,
> To walk the streets of our pious town?
>
> Luck's as black as the dead of night,
> Silk's as blond as the morning light.
> They stroll together as close as twins.
> Where they saunter trouble begins. (st. 1–2)

It may be more accurate to say that women are usually associated with subterranean forces in Adam's oeuvre, and that her demonic symbolism tends to be gendered rather than racialised.

[28] In a collection of early prose essays on Scottish superstition called *Ghosts and Fairies and Unearthly Creatures of Scottish Folklore*, Adam writes that the Devil 'manifest[ed] his wicked self in every possible form; from black man to "towsy tike" [shaggy dog]', attributing the popularising of 'legend of the Deil as a black man' to Robert Louis Stevenson's 1881 story "Thrawn Janet." (2007, 'The Deil's Capers', p. 389).

In *Miss Laura*, Prevallet detects 'echoes [of] the violent conclusions of Jean Toomer's "Blood Burning Moon" (in *Cane*) and Amiri Baraka's "Dutchman"' (2007, p. 473). Like *Miss Laura*, both works foreground race relations filtered through narratives of sexualized male/female relationships. In Toomer's 1923 short story, the son of a sugar cane plantation owner fights a Black factory worker for the affections of a young Black woman; the white suitor is killed in the struggle, and a vengeful lynch mob with kerosene and ropes capture the Black man and burn him alive. In *Dutchman*, the 1966 film adaptation of Baraka's surreal play, a white woman enters a subway car and engages in a flirtation with a young Black businessman, then stabs him with a sharpened phallic symbol in a sexually charged moment, a performance that as much resembles rape as murder. Other white passengers gather around and serve as accomplices. In contrast to the realism of Toomer's fiction, Baraka's screenplay is allegorical and the characters symbolic, but in both, the peril of identity for young Black men living within a dominant white culture is the prevailing theme.

Prevallet's suggestion that these works may have influenced Adam's *Miss Laura* is intriguing and plausible, especially as all share the same grim ending. The prose of 'Blood Burning Moon' is repeatedly punctuated by a communally chanted refrain that summons the Black plantation worker and foreshadows his capture:

> Red nigger moon. Sinner!
> Blood-burning moon. Sinner!
> Come out that fact'ry door. (Toomer, 1923, p. 29)

As a biracial author, Toomer is subversive in his use of a racial slur reflective of the prejudice prevalent during the period his story was published. Along with a structural echo of 'Blood Burning Moon's' charged refrain, in the triolets intermittently spiking Adam's poem, is a similar motif of burning and celestial bodies: 'the blare of his burning shook the sun from the skies!' (l. 40). And Miss Laura herself shares the role of seductress with the woman in the film *Dutchman*.

In addition to Baraka's script and Toomer's story, I propose other intertextual layers in the narrative and imagery of *Miss Laura*. Building upon the 1916 English lyric Davidson mentions – which is in fact a Scottish folk ballad – I will now consider two politically and historically relevant sources that might inform Adam's poem: the 1955 lynching of Black

teenager Emmett Louis Till, and William Blake's 1789 anti-slavery poem, 'The Little Black Boy'.

Black is the colour

With a one-line epigraph, Adam alerts the reader to the fact that *Miss Laura* revives a traditional folk song, one that, like Adam herself, was transported to America from its origins in Scotland: 'Black, black, black, is the colour of my true love's hair' (1967, epigraph). 'Black is the colour (of my true love's hair)' is catalogued as # 3103 in the comprehensive Roud Index of Folksong (among 35 variations the song is also known as 'Dark is the colour of my sweetheart's hair', and other titles). The earliest date of collection recorded by Roud is 1916, by Cecil Sharp (1966), with the music and lyrics later published in Sharp's collection *English Folk-Songs of the Southern Appalachians*.[29] Alan Lomax (1960), prominent field collector of American folk music, places 'Black is the Colour' amongst the '"old-time mountain love songs"' that borrow their 'sorrowful themes from England, Scotland, and Ireland', and traces it back to 'the lament of a young maiden for her drowned sailor sweetheart, long popular on both sides of the Atlantic' (p. 196-7). The ballad's Scottish provenance is evident in the version collected by Sharp, as it is set beside the River Clyde, a locale eliminated in later American versions:

> The winter's passed and the leaves are green,
> The time is passed that we have seen,
> But still I hope the time will come
> When you and I shall be as one.
>
> I go to the Clyde for to mourn and weep,
> But satisfied I never could sleep.
> I'll write to you a few short lines,
> I'll suffer death ten thousand times. (No. 85, st.3–4)

The separation of the speaker and beloved could result from either distance or death, and the union desired imagined as an occurrence in an afterlife yet to come, because in the poem's present, 'time is passed that we have seen'. A similar tale of mourning appears at the end of

[29] No. 85 in Sharp's collection, Sharp records that 'Black is the Colour' was 'Sung by Mrs. Lizzie Roberts at Hot Springs, N. C., Sept. 15, 1916.' There are many later iterations and performances of this ballad, including a popular jazz rendition called 'Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair' recorded by Nina Simone in 1959.

Adam's poem, where Miss Laura spends her days by the riverbank, 'speaking hoarse and low' to her dead lover (l. 48).

Miss Laura also expresses a yearning for union. The Scottish folk song's lyric puts it metaphorically, to be 'as one' with the lover, while in Adam's poem the sentiment appears as a sexual invitation: 'Love me naked. Throw away my clothes / My body's open, and I want you in' (ll. 28-9). This refrain bears the hallmark of an even earlier Scottish ballad, Child Ballad 216, versions A through C, collectively titled 'The Mother's Malison, or Clyde's Water' (Child, 2014, pp. 185–91).

This is another story of forbidden love, in which a mother places a 'malison' on her son, threatening that if he leaves her to visit his lover the Clyde will flood and drown him. In version A, 'Clyde's Water' (Skene manuscript, 1802–3, pg. 50, cited in Child, 2014, p. 184), William defies the curse and rides through the roaring waters of the Clyde, in full spate and overflowing its banks, only to be denied entry to Margaret's 'gate':

> An whan he came to his love's gates,
> He tirled at the pin:
> 'Open your gates, Meggie,
> Open your gates to me,
> For my beets are fu o Clyde's water,
> And the rain rains oure my chin.' (A.10)

The suggestive innuendo of 'gate' is literalised in Miss Laura's welcoming and open 'body', and the Clyde's dangerous gale and floodwaters become, in Adam's ballad, the Savannah's 'brimming river that the dusk blows across' (l. 16). *Miss Laura* also echoes the equestrian and gentleman caller motifs of 'Clyde's Water'. There, Margaret has so many suitors that one of her 'chamers', or chambers – typically 'fu o corn' or 'hay' – is 'fa o gentlemen, / An they winna move till day.' (A.13.1–3). This surfeit of men is her fatal reason for denying William entry, despite his desperate plea:

> 'Open your gates, Meggie, this ae night,
> Open your gates to me;
> For Clyde's water is fu o flood,
> An my mither's malison'll drown me.' (A.12)

In Adam's poem, following Miss Laura's betrayal of her groom and the ensuing catastrophe of his murder, that appeal is reversed, and the invitation to enter is repeated in the poem's final despairing apostrophe:

> My body's open, and I want you in.
> Black, black, black, black is the colour
> of my true love's skin! (ll. 51-3)

In the 'Clyde's Waters', Margaret follows William out through the storm and into the river, where the pair are 'na mare seen', except for the 'hat frae his head' and 'her comb an her sneed' (A.19). These floating markers of their drowning convey an even stranger picture, as if the lovers walk together beneath the surface of the water. Adam's setting *Miss Laura* on the banks of the Savannah as a place to 'mourn and weep' for the lost lover is significant, not only because it hews to the ballad templates she is reviving, but because the river as a site of grieving and remorse links *Miss Laura* to a historical occurrence whose narrative is closely aligned with her poem's: the infamous Mississippi lynching of African American teenager Emmet Till.

Emmet Till

In the summer of 1955, Emmett Louis Till had just turned fourteen when he went south by train from Chicago to visit an uncle and cousins, sharecroppers of cotton in the Mississippi Delta.[30] His mother prepared him for the visit by explaining southern segregation laws, and advised him to 'just forget your rights while you're in Mississippi' (Anderson, 2015, p. 20). One weekday evening that August, Emmett and a group of boys took the twenty-minute drive to the nearby town of Money, where they gathered around a checker game taking place outside Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market. The high-spirited Emmett – considered rambunctious and 'pranksterish' by his relatives – was encouraged by an older youth to enter the store to see the pretty woman working there, 21-year-old proprietor Carolyn Bryant. Emmett went into the store, and what transpired inside 'cannot be verified beyond Carolyn's word', but Devery S. Anderson (2015) has distilled various testimonies into 'a probable scenario':

[30] My summation of events draws on Devery S. Anderson's comprehensive 2015 history *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement*.

> Although Emmett's actions inside the store are not certain, at most he touched Carolyn Bryant's hand and asked her for a date […]. If Emmett did ask Carolyn Bryant for a date, his actions were only meant as a joke for the benefit of those outside. What may have been a joke to Emmett, however, was not funny to Carolyn. She followed Emmett to the door, and, once outside, Emmett waved and said, 'Good-bye,' which prompted Bryant to go toward the car [to get a pistol]. At that moment, Emmett whistled. (p. 34)

That wolf whistle alone would have been enough to get him killed. The following weekend, in the early hours, Carolyn Bryant's husband Roy, pointing a gun and accompanied by his half-brother J.W. Milam, entered the uncle's darkened home with flashlights and searched the bedrooms until they found Emmett and abducted him. The family went to the police, who interviewed the kidnappers. Roy Bryant admitted to taking Emmett but claimed to have turned him loose in Money. Emmett Till was found in the Tallahatchie River three days later, weighted down by an industrial fan tied to his body with barbed wire, and a gunshot wound to the skull. He had been so badly beaten one eye was dislodged and part of his head fell off in the boat when sheriffs lifted him out of the water.

In *Miss Laura*, the lover's murder is not by gunshot but by immolation – as in Toomer's story – yet, summoning an association with the place Emmett Till's body was found, an accretion of ominous river imagery foreshadows the Black groom's abduction. The courtship of Miss Laura and her groom takes them riding to 'walk their horses in the sundown glow / Beside Savannah where it ripples slow' (ll. 16-18). Miss Laura praises the perpetuity of the 'Savannah's wave', telling the groom it will '[s]till be flowing when we lie in the grave' (ll. 22-23). Finally, near the end of the poem, comes Miss Laura's regretful pining by the riverbank as she suffers the eternal burn of her traitorous tongue:

> Folk who wander by that river's brink,
> Just when the red sun's aiming to sink,
>
> Under the branches where the moss moves slow,
> Hear Miss Laura speaking hoarse and low.
>
> 'Love me, Honey, where Savannah flows.
> Love me naked. Throw away my clothes.' (ll. 46-50)

It's reasonable to surmise that Helen Adam was aware of Emmett Till's murder due to the event's prominence in the decade preceding her composition of *Miss Laura*. Emmett was returned to his mother in Chicago as a mutilated corpse, and his body, in an open casket

'under a thick, clear glass covering', was viewed by tens of thousands who came to pay their respects [31] (Anderson, 2015, p. 56). His murder made international headlines, becoming 'one of the south's most infamous tragedies' (Anderson, 2015, p. 20). After a five-day trial, Bryant and his accomplice Milam were found not guilty by an all-white jury.[32] According to the text on a commemorative plaque erected outside that same courtroom:

> Till's murder, coupled with the trial and acquittal of these two men, drew international attention and galvanized the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi and the nation. (cited in Anderson, 2015, p. 353)

Along with the prominence of the river in Helen Adam's *Miss Laura*, there are two other compelling resemblances of the Emmett Till murder case. One is the emphasis on Miss Laura's beauty:

> Ladies so pretty don't grow on trees.
> Rich men, poor men, down on their knees.
>
> Rich men, poor men, every man white.
> Miss Laura, lovely as the morning light. (ll. 7–10)

It is precisely because Carolyn Bryant was considered 'pretty' that a local youth dared Emmett to enter the store just to look at her. In a small town like Money, Mrs. Bryant would understandably have acquired a reputation for looks; as Anderson recounts, 'Carolyn was a former high school beauty queen who also won several beauty contests as a baby' (2015, p. 42). This characteristic alone would make the woman a fitting model for Adam's lovely *Miss Laura*. If Adam read or viewed any news of the trial, which was widely reported by national and international press, she may have noticed the commentary on Roy and Carolyn Bryant's 'handsome looks' and comparisons of the 'most attractive' Carolyn to a 'crossroads Marilyn Monroe' (American Experience, PBS, 2017, para. 9–10).

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[31] Anderson reports that 'between 10,000 and 50,000 people viewed the body that night, many of whom fainted or were otherwise taken ill after seeing the badly beaten, partially decomposed corpse' (2015, p. 56).

[32] Despite their admission of kidnapping to the initial investigating officers, in a separate hearing for that crime following the murder trial, a grand jury failed to bring an indictment. In 1956, knowing they were protected from retrial by double jeopardy, Bryant and Milam sold their story to *Look* magazine, admitting to their roles in the torture and murder of Emmett Till (Anderson, 2015, p. 208, 224).

Another similarity between *Miss Laura* and the Till tragedy is the white woman's accusation of sexual transgression against a young Black male. A statement made by Carolyn Bryant to lawyers shortly after her encounter with Emmett matches eyewitness accounts of others present that evening; however, later in court,

> Carolyn testified that Emmett's actions went far beyond what she had initially told her attorneys, and this evolution is where fabrications unquestionably crept into the narrative, if not before. She said that her customer held her by 'grasping all the fingers in the palm of his hand' and that she had to jerk herself free. At that point he asked for the date, and as Carolyn turned to head to the back of the store, the customer caught her by the cash register and grabbed her by the waist. It was at this point that he uttered the words, 'What's the matter, baby? Can't you take it?' She then freed herself and Till said, 'You needn't be afraid of me.' He then bragged in a crude manner that he had been 'with white women before.' (Anderson, 2015, p. 362)

Carolyn Bryant also claimed that a friend of Emmett's had to forcibly drag him away from her and out of the store. In Anderson's understanding, 'it is clear that this aspect of her story developed later for the purposes of gaining sympathy with the jury' (2015, p. 362). One female witness, who did not provide testimony at the trial, many years later admitted she had been looking through a window while Emmett was inside buying bubble-gum, and that '[all] Emmett did to offend Bryant was put his money in her hand instead of on the counter' (Anderson, 2015, p. 34).

Whether or not Adam was aware of Carolyn Bryant's embroidered testimony, Miss Laura's fabricated charge initiates a similar outcome. The mob's raid to capture her 'darky groom' parallel Bryant and Milam's forced search of Emmett's uncle's house by torchlight in the early hours, and their capture of Till:

> Early morning when the white men came,
> Running in packs and carrying flame.
>
> She heard them running, then she shrieked, and said,
> 'Black boy forced me to his savage bed!
> Forced Miss Laura to his jungle bed!' (ll. 30–35)

This depiction of the lynch mob warrants one final point regarding the poem's emphasis on Miss Laura's looks. The line 'Ladies so pretty don't grow on trees' is not throw-away cliché but mimesis for the 'strange fruit' of lynchings, evoking the hanging trees where murders of

Black men were staged as entertainment for white mobs.[33] Adam's dead metaphor therefore suggests another, related influence in *Miss Laura*. The 1939 song 'Strange Fruit', recorded and made famous by Billie Holiday, was written by Jewish American schoolteacher Abel Meeropol in response to a widely circulated image of a 1930 lynching of two young Black men (Blair, 2012). The 'most iconic photograph of lynching in America', it depicts the dead bodies of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith 'hanging from a tree surrounded by a crowd of ordinary citizens, including women and children' (Radio Diaries, 2010, para. 3). The song's extended metaphor of bodies as fruit is followed by sensory imagery of burning flesh that precedes Adam's depiction of the Black groom's being burned alive:

> Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
> Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
> Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
> Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
>
> Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
> The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
> Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
> And the sudden smell of burning flesh! (st.1–2, cited in Blair, 2012, para. 6)

Blake's 'The Little Black Boy'

While the compelling resemblances between *Miss Laura* and the Emmett Till case indicate that the story of the lynching informed her ballad, Helen Adam didn't limit the poem's message by making it specifically about Till's murder.[34] As we have seen, *Miss Laura* draws from several sources. Another intertext, I propose, and one that links Adam explicitly to Romanticism, is to be found in William Blake's 1789 *Songs of Innocence*, in his poem 'The Little Black Boy' (2009, pp. 14–15). More than a century apart, both Blake and Adam were writing during periods of heightened awareness about the oppression of Black people – for

[33] As an NAACP website article explains, these crimes 'were often public spectacles attended by the white community in celebration of white supremacy. Photos of lynchings were often sold as souvenir postcards' (2023, para. 3). Of course, 'pretty' ladies like Miss Laura (and Carolyn Bryant) by dint of their whiteness would be exempt from such tortures.

[34] Many other works were written in response to Till's murder, including Bob Dylan's (1962) ballad 'The Death of Emmett Till'.

Blake, the advent of Abolitionism in Britain, and for Adam, the American Civil Rights movement.[35]

Like *Miss Laura*, 'The Little Black Boy' is a study of a consciousness grappling with the inequities of racialized otherness. Written in the context of Britain's nascent abolitionist movement, the poem serves as Blake's 'antislavery statement' (Henry, 1995, p. 10). In 1787, only two years prior to the publication of Blake's poem, a Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed, and with its inception began a unified public campaign against the British slave trade (Ditchfield, 2007, para. 1).[36] Blake's poem opens with the eponymous speaker situating himself in a colonial schematic of racial hierarchy:

> My mother bore me in the southern wild,
> And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
> White as an angel is the English child:
> But I am black as if bereav'd of light. (st.1)

The boy then relays his mother's lessons about the transience of life, and the dual nature of a loving creator, a sun God who both bestows light and burns with it:

> And we are put on earth a little space,
> That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
> And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
> Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove. (st.4)

The poem's conclusion contains its own contradictions: here, the little Black boy envisions himself one day 'free' of his black 'cloud' body to become 'like' the English child and hence worthy of the white boy's love; however, inculcated in the Black boy's vision is the assumption that equality in the afterlife comes with continued servitude. Like a grove himself, he 'shades' the white child, protecting and at the same time imitating him, living in the long shadow cast by a boy with 'silver hair':

> I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear,
> To lean in joy upon our Father's knee,

[35] In America, the Civil Rights Act was not passed until 1957, two years after Till's murder and ten years before the publication of *Miss Laura*.

[36] The campaign did not achieve legislative results until the passage in stages of *The Slave Trade Act* in 1806 and 1807 (Ditchfield, 2007, para. 8). This legislation was followed by *The Slavery Abolition Act* of 1833.

And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him and he will then love me. (st.7)

Lauren Henry acknowledges the condemnation that has been (retrospectively) levied at the conclusion of 'The Little Black Boy' 'for its evasion of historical realities and its imperialist implications', noting that the Black child's apparent acquiescence to a heavenly afterlife where 'he is the playmate and yet still the servant of the white child seems to substantiate such criticism' (1995, p.10). This interpretation is countered by an alternate reading of the poem's paradoxical last lines (a convincing reading – once you see it, you can't unsee it): Henry notes that many readers of 'The Little Black Boy' 'recognise irony as its central element', citing Harold Bloom's assessment that the poem is 'one of the most deliberately misleading and ironic of all Blake's lyrics' (1963, cited in Henry, 1995, fn. 1, p. 4).

Adam's ballad mirrors and extends Blake's poem, creating its negative with a composite of inverted imagery. 'The Little Black Boy' and *Miss Laura* both open with affirmations of innate human equality; Blake's poem starts with the problematic appeal of the Black child, that despite his skin colour his 'soul is white', while Adam's mounts a challenge to racial segregation laws and prejudices – 'White girl, black man, where is the sin?' However, the religiosity of Blake's poem, and its idealised – or ironised – vision of emancipation, is subverted by Adam into a sinister vision of (state-sponsored) crimes against Black Americans.

The Southern Wild

Blake's African 'southern wild', the Black boy's original home recalled as place of nurture, is in the world of *Miss Laura* transported into an American Jim Crow south run amok with lynch fires 'howling up and down the south!' Henry situates Blake's poem within the writings of his Black contemporaries – 'eighteenth-century England's small but notable African literary community' (1995, p. 1) – offering evidence that 'The Little Black Boy' has gathered from these works, and from African-American literature, a knowledge of African traditions of sun worship 'from the protective covering of a "shady grove"' (1995, p. 9): [37]

[37] Henry draws convincing parallels between tree and sun imagery in 'The Little Black Boy' with African American poet Phillis Wheatley's 1773 'An Hymn to Morning' in lines such as

The grove in Blake's poem is depicted as a place of worship and learning, where, the speaker recalls, his 'mother taught [him] underneath a tree' to '[l]ook on the rising sun: there God does live / and gives his light, and gives his heat away.' (st.2, l.1; st.3, ll.1–2).

Adam parlays Blake's tree and sun symbolism into a Gothic trove of foreshadowing and ominous imagery. Consider, for instance, Miss Laura's clichéd falsehood that the 'savage' groom has forcibly taken her to his 'jungle bed'; much as Black slaves themselves were apprehended and transported, the jungle itself is displaced and debased. The protective tree that shelters the little Black boy, and the shady grove that shields him from the sun – symbolising, like the cloud, his temporal, bodily existence – in *Miss Laura* become

> Ancient avenues, and haunts of gloom.
> Miss Laura's riding with her darky groom,
>
> Riding slowly under shrouds of moss
> To the brimming river that the dusk blows across. (ll. 13-16)

Adam's imagery is effective in its dark realism, capturing the long tree-lined drives that led to the great plantation houses. The Blakean grove is here a haunted place, its spectres unspecified, as if Miss Laura and her dark-skinned groom traverse the site of their own future afterlives. The 'shrouds' draping the trees are Spanish Moss, a plant that 'epitomizes the Deep South and the Southern way of life':

> Movies, television shows and artworks depicting the South almost always show stereotypical live oak trees festooned with the wispy gray plant that blankets hardwood forests and swamps from East Texas across Mississippi to Southeastern Virginia. (Felsher, 2022, para. 1)

Adam renders the strange, ethereal appearance of this native plant funereal, and with it adds a last foreboding image as the poem nears its end, leaving a wraith-like Miss Laura to mourn '[u]nder the branches where the moss moves slow' (l. 48).

The rising sun that in Blake represents Christianity is an image fraught by the African boy's conundrum, who must 'learn to bear the beams of love' of a distant religion (st. 4, l. 2): 'Look on the rising sun: there God does live / And gives his light, and gives his heat away'

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this: "Ye shady groves, your verdant gloom display/ To shield your poet from the burning day." (Wheatley, cited in Henry, 1995, pg. 5).

(st.3, ll. 1–2). The attendant suffering of 'black bodies and this sun-burnt face' is earthly, temporal, and that promised heat, bearable (st.4, ll.3). In contrast to this lesson taught by the Black boy's mother, then, is the application of light, sun, and heat motifs in *Miss Laura*. Revisiting these lines – 'Early morning when the white men came, / Running in packs, and carrying flame' (ll. 32–33) – one sees the lurking subtext of Blake's generous (white) God dispensing love beams, here transformed by Adam into white men wielding torches and meting out cruelty:

> They lit the faggots, and the flame licked high.
> He cried 'Miss Laura!' with his last loud cry.
>
> For her was the last wild glance of his eyes.
> 'Ere the blare of his burning shook the sun from the skies!
> Black man burning shook the sun from the skies! (ll. 36-40)

With those exclamatory cries, Blake's naturalistic image of 'sun-burnt' skin is kindled into a hellish conflagration, as the burning alive of a Black man shakes that same sun from a godless sky.

Assimilation/Integration

Both *Miss Laura* and 'The Little Black Boy' prophecy a futurity of racial equity – in Blake, this freedom from inequity (and from slavery) occurs only in a state of transcendence, and in a Christian heaven: 'When I from black and he from white cloud free, / And round the tent of God like lambs we joy' (st.6, ll. 3–4). Only then, after death, with his 'white soul' released and detached from the delimiting colour of his earthly body, will the little Black Boy achieve his dream of being like the English child. Blake's poem envisions in its concluding statement – however ironically intended it may be – an equality predicated on assimilation: '[I'll] be like him and he will then love me' (st.7, l. 4). To be *other*, to be *unlike*, is to be unloved (perhaps that was his point).

In *Miss Laura*, Adam glances back at Blake to render, without irony, a world of hate, not love. In Adam's poem, the temptress's vision of equality 'whispered' by Miss Laura 'in her muted voice' is situated in a living, carnal realm (l. 20):

> Lovers walking in the future's light,
> Will care no longer if they're black or white.
> Oh! care no longer if they're black or white. (ll. 24-6)

The ‘future’s light’ is human, rather than heavenly. Here, true racial equality comes without the wait for an afterlife of qualified emancipation where equity is posited on the loss of dark identity. *Miss Laura’s* refrain, ‘care no longer if they’re black or white’, can be read as a reckless riposte to the central dilemma in ‘The Little Black Boy’; Miss Laura’s ‘sweet talk’ (l. 3) to her lover pointedly echoes the boy’s mother’s instruction to her son:

> For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear
> The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice.
> Saying: come out from the grove my love & care,
> And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice. (st. 5)

This stanza in Blake is a precursor to Adam’s blighted prediction of an enlightened future. The word ‘care’ here has two possible meanings: linked by the ampersand to ‘my love’ it is a form of endearment, a direct address from the heavenly voice to the little Black boy assuring him he is both loved and cared for. Structurally parallel to the verb ‘rejoice’, which likewise ends the next line, ‘care’ also functions as an exhortation, or even a form of warning – to feel concern and show affection (as the Black boy imagines offering his care to the English child), or to exercise caution and feel worry.

Unlike the little Black boy, who must ‘care’ overmuch about his colour, people in Miss Laura’s utopian future will ‘care no longer’. Any implicit remonstration of Blake’s flawed proposal is undercut by Miss Laura’s premature implementation of her optimistic vision and the catastrophic consequences of her carelessness toward the groom she seduces – or to be precise, the disempowered servant she sexually assaults. In *Miss Laura*, the demonic, consuming nature true to Helen Adam’s monstrous female typology reveals itself in the poem’s last lines, where the speaker urges an act of physical assimilation in the poem’s final carnal refrain:

> My body’s open, and I want you in.
> Black, black, black, black is the colour
> of my true love’s skin! (ll. 51–53)

In her own radical act of possessing (and being possessed by) Blake’s poem and transporting its shared concerns into her own century, Helen Adam has absorbed ‘The Little Black Boy’ into the body of her Gothic corpus, and into her own poetic statement against racial inequality.

Farewell, Stranger

Helen Adam did not assimilate into the great American melting pot, although she certainly integrated herself into the poetry community in San Francisco, and, at the time of her death in 1993, New York's literary and theatrical scene. Adam never returned to Scotland, and despite becoming an American Citizen, always felt herself to be 'still Scottish' (Packard interview, 2007, p. 335). This nostalgia for Scotland is expressed in 1974's 'Farewell, Stranger', which again reprises the lover's pining from 'Black is the Colour'. Here, the speaker finds her own shore to weep upon, 'a thousand miles [from her] true love's breast':

> Morning, noon, and night time,
> The sea wind blows the sand.
> Wherever I walk, wherever I run,
> I'm a stranger in this land.
>
> Someone's walking behind me:
> Someone always alone,
> Playing a tune with her smiling mouth
> On a flute of splintered bone. (st.5, l. 3; st.1–2.)

The poem mourns simultaneously for the 'lost true love' and for the loss of an estranged self, both now 'strangers' to the speaker. There is no possibility of returning home, and the poem ends with a paradoxical refrain advising that the destination across the ocean gets farther away the more one moves toward it – 'if ever you near your journey's end, / There's a thousand miles to go' (st.6, ll. 4–5).

The poem's persona – a proxy for Adam herself – is an archetype of the Gothic wanderer, and Adam literalises the split or 'splintered' psyche of the immigrant as a 'co-walker' (a performative one, at that). Included in her informal notes on Scottish folklore is an entry titled 'Meeting One's Own Image':

> One of the most wide-spread of these tales is the legend of the 'fetch' or the 'forego.' Stories of people who have met 'themselves,' with inevitably fatal results, are told in almost every Highland district; though it is by no means a purely Scottish superstition, since Ireland, Wales, and several European countries share it. Shelley enshrined the idea in one of his poems'. (2007, Appendix A, 'The Early Years', p. 387)[38]

[38] According to Adam, 'To meet your own image meant death within three days, for the apparition has been sent from the other world to fetch you away' (p. 388). Such an event

A detailed account of such doppelgängers appears in the Reverend Robert Kirk's 1691 treatise on the *Secret Commonwealth of Fairies* (a book probably available to the young Helen, as it was reprinted with a foreword by Andrew Lang in 1893). Kirk speculates on the motivations of this 'Doubleman', 'Reflex-man', or 'Co-walker',

> every way like the Man, as Twin-brother and Companion, haunting him as his shadow, as is oft seen and known among Men (resembling the Originall,) both before and after the Originall is dead; […] This Copy, Echo, or living Picture, goes att last to his own Herd. It accompanied that Person so long and frequently for Ends best known to it selfe, whither to guard him from the secret Aussaults of some of its own Folks, or only as ane sportfull Ape to counterfeit all his Actions. (1893, pp. 9–10)

This Co-walker is visible only to 'siers' or those possessing 'the exalted [second] sight (whether by Art or nature)' (Kirk, 1893, p. 10).

By art, Helen Adam has summoned her own co-walker, the Echo of her distant Scottish self. As Dorothy McMillan notes, and as I have attempted to illustrate in this chapter, she is at her 'most dynamically original when she uproots the Scottish ballads and locates them firmly in her adopted country' (2019, pp. 8–9). Edwin Morgan (1999) likewise attributes Adam's 'unique' Gothic poetics of displacement to her enduring strangerhood:

> she would never have made anything of her poetry, even though she wrote a lot of it, if she remained in her native place. She was a latent poet who needed the jolt of an entirely different environment to bring to the surface what was subterraneanly there. Later in life she took out American citizenship, and in American bibliographies she is called an American poet. But that won't do. She was unmistakably a Scottish poet who learned a new boldness and vivacity in California, but who never lost touch with the Scottish oral tradition she grew up with. (p. 22)

Like many Scottish emigrants of the twentieth century, Helen Adam and her family were not displaced due to enforced exile but because of a combination of happenstance and choice. Ian

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transpires in Shelley's 1820 lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, described here in The Earth's narration:

> The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child,
> Met his own image walking in the garden.
> That apparition, sole of men, he saw.
> For know there are two worlds of life and death:
> One that which thou beholdest; but the other
> Is underneath the grave [.] (Act 1, ll. 192-9)

Brown cites Cairns Craig's suggestion that, rather than diaspora or exile, a more fitting term for Scottish migrations is a Greek term, xeniteia;[39]

> Xeniteian migrants do not arrive in their new territories as victims of forced expulsion dreaming of a return to the homeland, but as masons or architects who carry with them the plan by which they will rebuild the familiar structures of their homeland in a foreign place. (2020, p. 239)

Morgan's summation of Adam's career expresses a very similar notion – that 'she moved from Scotland to the world, and made something of it' [1999, p. 22]. As a displaced makar, using as raw material the familiar structures of the archaic Scottish ballad and visionary Romanticism, Helen Adam remapped her heritage and her homeland onto a newly discovered Gothic wild zone of her own invention.

[39] Cairns Craig argues that due to 'the active role of many of those who took part in migration from Scotland, "diaspora" is an inadequate and misleading term' (cited in Brown, 2020, p. 239) – 'inadequate', perhaps, but 'misleading' overlooks the fact that Scottish immigrant populations are nevertheless dispersed and scattered from their ancestral homelands.

Chapter 2: *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* as 'The Daemon Lover' / 'Tam Lin': The Economic Migrant and Enchantment as a Recruitment Strategy

I stand neither in the wilderness
nor fairyland

but in the fold
of a green hill

'The Wishing Tree', Kathleen Jamie (2004)

Described as 'one of the most curious cases of cross-dressing in Canadian history' (Knight, 1990, p. 28), the story of a Scottish woman who secured employment in Canada's early fur-trade by presenting herself for hire in male-drag has been notably depicted in Anne Wheeler's film *The Orkney Lad* (2001), Audrey Thomas's historical novel *Isabel Gunn* (1999), and, preceding these fictionalised treatments, in Scottish-Canadian poet Stephen Scobie's long poem *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* (1987). Following the poem's publication, it has been variously regarded in terms of feminist, postmodern, and post-colonial criticism that emphasised Scobie's engagement with literary theory; as I will discuss below, it has received only passing mention of its debt to the ballad tradition and scant notice of its fairy-tale antecedents. A close reading of the *Ballad*'s engagement with key Gothic motifs such as otherworldly landscapes, thresholds, and the grave and other features inherited from folklore, romanticism, and Scottish poetry and song will reveal a Scottish fairy ballad stealthily masquerading as a Canadian documentary poem.

Principally set in remote regions such as Labrador, the poem might be read as a specimen of Can Lit 'wilderness Gothic',[40] but a very particular sort of wilderness is discovered. As Diane Purkiss (2001) notes in her cultural history of fairy lore and literature, *Troublesome Things,* fairies are associated with locales beyond familiar boundaries, and fairyland as a fictive site was remapped in concert with the pace of exploration in the New World – in Scottish minister Robert Kirk's seventeenth-century treatise *The Secret Commonwealth*, for instance, the notion of a 'fairy kingdom, a space alongside but outside the homely, the idea of two societies living side by side, was a paradigm for the colonial

[40] Faye Hammill notes that a 'prevalence of wilderness motifs in the national literature was the basis for the earliest critical accounts of Canadian Gothic' and the 'vast, sparsely-populated forests of Labrador, Quebec and Ontario, or the frozen areas further north, are the classic setting for Canadian Gothic texts' (2003, p. 47).

situation' (p. 204). Rearticulating Charles Taylor's conception of a secular social imaginary in the early modern period, Diane Long Hoeveler (2010) says 'it became possible to believe simultaneously in both the realms of the supernatural and the natural, the enchanted and the disenchanted, at the same (uneasy) time' (p. 4).

Michel Foucault, in an influential 1967 lecture published as *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1986, trans. Jay Miskowiec), ascribes a similar notion to post-nineteenth-century conceptions of 'space', that is, space as the 'relations among sites' in our 'epoch of simultaneity', and proposes the term 'heterotopology' for understanding the 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live' (pp. 22–24). My analysis of Scobie's *Ballad* includes an application of the Foucauldian construct of heterotopia to the fairyland (or secret commonwealth, to borrow Kirk's apt term) wherein, with subtle transparency, the poem's narrative is placed – an otherworldly realm contiguous with and mirroring the seductive utopian notion of Canada held by the migrant labourers recruited by the Hudson's Bay Company. In the *Ballad*, Scobie has hybridised form to create a historical gothic narrative of a mythical frontier environment and its costly effects on migrant workers.

Alan R. Knight (1990) identifies several 'patterns of doubles' in the Ballad:

> the double heritage of the immigrant; the double identity (and sex) of the author/narrator; the double life of Isabel's lover, John Scarth […]; and even the doubleness of the poem itself. (p. 50)

To this list I would add the doubleness of inhabiting two places simultaneously – the Canadian wilderness and a heterotopic fairyland. A similar paradox is expressed in the epigraph taken from Kathleen Jamie's (2004) poem, 'The Wishing Tree': 'I stand neither in the wilderness / nor fairyland' (l. 1–2). The speaker, a coin tree, is both wishful – its own hopefulness expressed by its coming into bud – and wished upon, its 'limbs […] scabbed with greenish coins' people have 'beaten' into it (ll. 15–16). These coins are tokens of hopes and dreams, and the tree functions as a psychic gatekeeper by 'hoard[ing] / the common currency / of longing' (ll. 11-13). Chris Jones (2014) observes that this is a 'Scottish tree (it says '*smirr* of rain') with an interest in delineated boundaries' (Two Worlds, para. 8). The tree also mediates a topographical threshold, the 'fold / of a green hill' marking where the land behind it 'reaches toward the Atlantic' (ll. 3–4, 20). This is the ocean Isabel will cross in pursuit of love and wealth. Entry tolls and the crossing of thresholds are recurrent motifs in

The Ballad of Isabel Gunn, and Jamie's poem offers a fitting entry into my analysis of its narrative. A note to the reader: the sub-headings in this chapter are lines excerpted from *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*.

his mark on the line, a deeply scratched X
beside his name: John Fubbister

Stephen Scobie is regarded as a poet and critic who 'cherishes Robert Burns' and 'writes at the intersection of Scottish tradition and the radically displaced perspectives of European modernism' (Ricou, 2005, p. 1409), so it is perhaps not surprising that the critical reception of *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* pivoted toward contemporary literary theory. In a subsequent collection of essays (with the Derridean title *Signature Event Cantext*) Scobie himself acknowledged that his *Ballad* 'lays a particular stress on the forged signature' (1989, p. 122). Indeed, Scobie so successfully melded the documentary and ballad forms that critics either ignored, minimised, or rejected the poem's titular form. By self-identifying as a particular genre, the title *Ballad* courted resistance, and while its classification as 'documentary' was not contested, the designation 'ballad' elicited mixed responses. Jay Johnson (1990), for example, states that although 'on its back cover *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* is described as a "traditional ballad," it is, in fact […] a long poem-sequence […] made up of a number of short poems' (p. 124). Smaro Kamboureli (1991), while acknowledging that the poem includes 'many ballad elements', points out that the 'specification "ballad" is somehow at odds with' Isabel's synchronic relationship to her poetic personae; furthermore, Kamboureli argues that 'Scobie's own act of entitling the poem *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*' creates an 'ideological distancing' like that found in his previous documentary long poem *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* (p. 93).

Clearly, it would be hard to convince a reader that a poem is an *opera*, but *ballad* is a different matter. Peter Jaeger (1994), applying to it Linda Hutcheon's term 'historiographic metafiction', is somewhat more receptive to the notion that Scobie's *Ballad* is what it purports to be, 'albeit in a highly adapted fashion':

> Scobie's designation 'ballad' is significant inasmuch as the poem carries on the traditional ballad's continuous narrative structure, while simultaneously expanding that form to include prose texts quoted verbatim, lyric verse, and visual reproductions. The formal structure of the ballad mirrors the actions of

> Isabel, for just as Isabel crosses genders, Scobie adapts his text to straddle conventional and contemporary forms. (para. 3)

This particular fusion of genres is not as unlikely as it might seem. Traditional ballads such as those collected by Thomas Percy, Walter Scott, and Francis James Child in the eighteenth century and Romantic period are rooted in 'folk and working-class conditions', and the 'art form most integrally connected to the ballad is … song and, more broadly, the oral tradition' (Thomson and Fall, 2019, p. 265).[41] An emphasis on working-class concerns is also typical of the twentieth-century documentary poem.

The term 'documentary poem' was coined by Canadian poet Dorothy Livesay, a self-consciously political poet, who, following her 'conversion' to Marxism in the 1930s, considered the 'public', whose concerns her work represented, to be composed of 'workers and communists' (Lancit, 2017, p. 112). Later, following an eventual disavowal of Marxism, she 'retrospectively theorised the genre that she developed' in an influential 1969 article titled 'The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre'; in comparing this emergent literary form to experimental documentary film, Livesay emphasised that documentary poems were written for performance, with a particular suitability for being broadcast on radio (Lancit, 2017, p. 120). In her article, Livesay determined that the generic Canadian long poem was neither narrative nor historical epic but 'documentary' – specifically, a work of research based on topical historical and geographic data, featuring no single protagonist, and composed of 'descriptive, lyrical and didactic elements' (1971, cited in Kamboureli, 1991, pp. 43–44).

The term has proven slippery: as Alan R. Knight (1990) puts it: 'To give the documentary long poem the status of genre is unavoidably misleading since its most consistent feature is its resistance to generic definition' (p. 50). However, in an article titled 'Amelia, or: Who Do You Think You Are? Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature', Scobie (1984) nevertheless attempted a refinement of Livesay's 'brilliant' and 'prophetic' naming of the form, which was, in his view, rendered problematic by her inconsistent and sometimes poorly-chosen case studies, including a 'positively disastrous'

[41] According – again – to the book's back cover, Scobie (1987), in collaboration with composer Ernie Manera, 'set The Ballad of Isabel Gunn to music' (Cover copy, para. 2), befitting the ballad's oral tradition; it would be interesting to know if this composition was publicly performed, as a recording or score would be yet another 'text' to add to the layers of actual and, in the Ballad's case, invented documents that typify documentary poems.

example that resulted in a lawsuit when she erroneously claimed that a poem about a hiker falling to his death was more than a mere work of the imagination (p. 267). [42] Scobie's own criteria was derived from a survey of the Canadian long poems produced in the fifteen years that followed Livesay's introduction of the term, and the findings of this analysis are neatly summarised by Peter Dickinson (1996) in a 'five-point checklist' for documentary poems:

> (1) a given poem's narrative length and structure; (2) the degree to which the poem supplements or modifies historical events with 'fictional incidents'; (3) its focalization through a single character who took part in these events, and its frequent adoption of his or her 'speaking voice'; (4) its use of historical 'documents' (journals, maps, et cetera) as intertexts; and (5) the ironic relationship that it establishes between the contemporary 'poet' and the historical 'persona,' a dialectic that 'continues to be, as Livesay perceived, the central characteristic of the genre.' (p. 107)

This checklist reads like a prospectus for Scobie's yet-to-be-published *Ballad*, but Scobie's understanding of the form's structure, content and voice – usually, according to his findings, a book-length narrative of 'historical happenings' that 'focuses on a single character who took part in these events' (1984, p. 269) – is at odds with Livesay's stance that deprivileges narrative or the foregrounding of a specific protagonist, and is more in sympathy with characteristics ascribed to traditional Scottish ballads. As described by Alan Riach (2017), the Border ballads are 'stories in song' whose 'form arises from oral delivery, extemporisation and extension of story through the immediate engagement of an individual performer' (pp. 76–77).

The historical happenings in these song-stories originate from what Lowry Charles Wimberley (1965), in *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads* – his 'exhaustive survey' of customs, beliefs, magic and religion in traditional English and Scottish balladry (vii) – describes as a world of primitive thought. With the disclaimer that 'incidents and ideas found in the ballads may not reflect' the actual practices of those voicing them, Wimberley states that the ballads nonetheless 'give a bona fide record of the stuff of actual tradition' (pp. 6, 17), and cites Francis B. Gummere's tantalising assertion that '[t]he worst stories […] come directly from life, and ballad or tale simply follows fact – a hint for the too eager discoverer of a literary origin for every narrative in verse' (1907 cited in Wimberley 1965,

[42] Livesay's 'incredibly badly worded assertion' that Earle Birney's poem 'David' was based on actual events resulted in legal action by Birney; the case was eventually settled out of court (Scobie, 1984, p. 267).

p. 8). For Gummere, the ballads 'speak more willingly of old custom than old myth' and depict 'a kind of obsolete reality' (1913, cited in Wimberly, p. 13). While the orally transmitted poetic record is of a different order to the written history the documentary relies upon, the ballad does bear a resemblance to the documentary poem in its impetus to relay a type of testimony. As Emily Lyle (1994) puts it, 'literal truth is not the only truth'; though the ballad singers 'would often have thought that their stories were true', the '*emotional* truths encapsulated' in their narratives convey an 'inner reality' that still resonates (p. 18, original emphasis).

Although Scobie's book-length poem is not composed in the metrically regular form that typifies the ballad, but of a sequence of untitled free verse segments, these forty 'poems' nonetheless function as stanzas that would not stand alone if individually extracted from the whole.[43] As far as length is concerned, the determining factor for both genres rests upon the story being told: a ballad's extension, according to Riach, varies to accommodate 'the event and its moment' (2017, p. 77), while the documentary poem, according to Scobie (1984), is governed by the central character's 'biography', which 'provides the structure of the book' (p. 269).

spiriting away, as clean as any seal
in fact or legend, into Canada

Isobel Gunn's biography, rich with the 'mysterious travels, mythical locations, grim portents, potent images and narrative tension' that 'animate the ballad' (Riach, 2017, p. 78), readily lends itself to a book-length treatment. In the *Ballad's* acknowledgements page Scobie lists various sources for the pattern of events that unfolds in his fictionalised version of Isobel's life (1987, p. 61), and the sketchy details preserved in parish records, company archives and local lore are summarised in several articles readily available online.[44]

A distillation of the record portrays the life of an Orcadian woman named Isobel or Isabelle or Isabella Gunn, also known as Mary Fubister or Fubbister (her stepfather's

[43] Ballad verse, per Emily Lyle's succinct explanation, is 'a four-line stanza with alternate four-stress and three-stress iambic lines rhyming abcb' and typically 'the second and fourth lines are refrains' (1994, p. 11).

[44] For comprehensive accounts see Ricou (2005) and the HBC Heritage website (©2016).

surname), born in Orkney in 1780 or 1781.[45] At the approximate age of twenty-five, disguised as a man under the alias 'John Fubbister', she signed a three-year contract with the Hudson's Bay Company (the HBC) to work in Rupert's Land, now Canada, for £8 per year (other than the Indigenous women employed at their fur-trading posts, the HBC prohibited the hiring of European women, yet relied on a supply of male labourers from Orkney who were valued for their ability to endure the harsh living conditions).[46]

Whether Isobel was following a lover to Canada, was inspired by her brother's account of his own adventures with the HBC, or simply seeking lucrative work remains open to speculation, but in the summer of 1806 aboard the *Prince of Wales* she set sail for Labrador, part of the empire's floating labour pool. After arriving in Fort Albany, she spent two years working 'at anything and well like the rest of the men' (Heney, 1807 cited in Gwiazda 2018), undertook several supply delivery expeditions to remote outposts such as Moose Factory and Martin Falls, and endured a brutal winter in Pembina on the Red River, the first European woman to set foot in that region. Near the end of her term – in both senses – while working in Canada's northern territories, 'John' Fubbister was outed when s/he gave birth to a baby boy. The baby was baptised John Scarth, and his namesake was a long-time employee of the HBC who had departed Orkney on the same voyage as Isobel. Demoted to washerwoman for the remainder of her employ, 'Mary' Fubbister returned to Orkney in 1809 on the same ship she'd boarded three years earlier. In 1861, at eighty years of age, she died in Stromness, known at the end as Isobel Gunn, an impoverished subsistence knitter.

Despite granting himself license to 'shuffle these events' – per his description of the documentary poet's usual practice – in the *Ballad* Scobie follows the chronological trajectory of Isobel's known journey, while making good use of his dictum that in documentary poems factual history is frequently embellished with 'purely fictional incidents' (1984, p. 269). Actual historical documents used as intertexts, such as photos of archaeological sites in Orkney, HBC illustrations depicting ships and remote trading forts, copies of archival receipt-books and journal excerpts, are supplemented with invented letters written to the

[45] Scobie's affinity for the alias is reflected in his spelling of Gunn's first name; throughout this thesis I refer to the historical person as Isobel, and Scobie's fictional creation as Isabel.

[46] 'In 1799, of the 530 men working in the Hudson's Bay Company post in North America, 416 were from Orkney' (Towrie ©2004, The Hudson's Bay Company, para. 4).

illiterate Isabel by her estranged lover Scarth and read aloud to her by one James Brown, another real-life HBC hire whose role as Isabel's go-between and helper is entirely invented.

Bonnie Davie, dainty Davie
It's who will answer what he's wrocht?

Another invention, germane to the specific ballad narratives Scobie is working from, is a love triangle involving a charming young shipbuilder's son, a labourer from Fife named David Spence Junior, the man to whom Isabel privately assigns her son's paternity. Balladry has its own tradition of intertextuality, deriving 'elements from various sources, from medieval literature, from chronicles, from classic sources, and from tradition, sacred or otherwise' (Wimberley 1965, p. 21), and the *Ballad's* intertexts include several familiar-sounding folk songs. Isabel introduces her romantic predicament by inviting the reader – 'You know the old song?' (p. 35) – to summon to mind one of these approximations, a tune called 'Dainty Davie':

> He gives me kisses one two three
> Bonnie Davie, dainty Davie
> And swears by the moon that he'll marry me
> My ain dear dainty Davie. (p. 36)

Modelled on an 'old song' that was also the source for later versions popularised by Robert Burns (Barke and Smith 1959, p. 10), Scobie's appropriation participates in a cycle of self-reflexive revisions, and this ballad-within-the-ballad performs, via its own chequered history, a winking cultural shorthand for illicit sexual relationships and unwed pregnancy. The original, unattributed song originated circa 1657, and 'Dainty Davie', according to prefatory notes in *The Book of Scottish Song*,

> is the name of an old merry sang from which Burns has borrowed nothing save the title and the measure. It relates the adventure of David Williamson, a preacher of the days of the covenant: he was pursued by Dalzell's dragoons, and seeking a refuge in the house of Cherrytrees, the devout lady put the man of God into a bed beside her daughter, to hide him from the men of Belial. The return which the reverend gentleman made for this is set forth very graphically in the old verses. (Cunningham, 1834, cited in Whitelaw 1843, p. 98)

Burns' own indecorous version was published in 1799 in the privately circulated *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* – 'probably the most infamous collection of bawdry to be privately printed in Scotland' (Mackay, 2016, p. 434). That rendition, with its salacious rhyming of

‘gravy’ and ‘Davie’, illustrates the editorial opinion of Hans Hecht that ‘the gist of the song may be old but very frequently it underwent the poet’s encroachment to heighten the artistic effect’ (1936, cited by Barke and Goodsir Smith, 1959, p. 100).

The ‘polite’ version that Burns published in the *Scots Musical Museum* c.1797 is itself ‘an improvement and extension of an earlier song’ called ‘The Gardener wi’ his paidle’, and is suggestive rather than explicit in its nature-inspired imagery of springtime fertility: [47]

> Now rosy May comes in wi' flowers
> To deck her gay, green-spreading bowers;
> And now comes in the happy hours
> To wander wi' my Davie.
>
> The crystal waters round us fa'
> The merry birds are lovers a',
> The scented breezes round us blaw
> A wandering wi' my Davie. (st.2–3)

Scobie’s gloss on Burns’s ‘polite’ version is embedded in Isabel’s reverie, as she awaits Davie’s return and the ‘final harmony’ of his laughter:

> At last it was pure lyric, rowing the Red
> in the late August sun, with the banks slipping by
> to the silver notes of the slender birch
> like a line of descant, tossed in the breeze. (p. 45)

The song has overflowed its banks and subsumes the vessel containing it. After a year of leading a ‘double life’ with two identities and two lovers, Isabel submits to a brief period of happiness as she is ‘doubled again’ by the growing ‘life inside’ her, and she simultaneously voices and inhabits the lyric in a romantically pregnant transcendence adumbrated by a simple statement: ‘The song / was all around me’ (pp. 40, 45).

The short-lived season of Isabel’s joyous relationship with Davie is interrupted by the reappearance of the man she met in Orkney, John Scarth. Scobie’s addition of the undocumented affair with Spence is, arguably, to afford Isabel opportunity for payback against Scarth, from whom she is separated upon landing in Canada (in keeping with the historical record, Scarth is dispatched to the Eastmain River while Isabel sails west to Fort

[47] Also known as ‘The Gardener’s March’, in this song a gardener goes about fertilising various plots with his ‘paidle’, a long-handled garden implement. (Whitelaw, 1843, p. 98)

Albany). The love triangle, as Kenneth Hoeppner (1989) reads it, serves both dramatic and thematic functions:

> Scobie […] invents a second lover for Isabel, Davie Spence, in order to even the account with John Scarth for his infidelity. […] Isabel thinks the image of exchange: 'Trade-goods were all we lived by.' (p. 136)

Hoeppner's point regarding images of exchange merits further attention. However, there's another purpose for Scobie's invention to consider first – that is, in the way that Isabel carries inside an unborn Dainty Davie, so the folksong is set within a larger narrative, and the deep structure governing the *Ballad* is the template of a traditional supernatural ballad called 'The Daemon Lover', overlaid by the fairy-tale plot of another, 'Tam Lin'.[48]

his soul was claimed away from me, John Scarth,
as if by a horn-book devil

Known variously as 'James Harris' (or Herries), 'The Carpenter's Wife', 'The Distressed Ship-Carpenter', 'The Daemon Lover' and 'The Banks of Italy', and in America as 'The House-Carpenter', [49] the evolution of what the folktale and ballad collector Peter Buchan called 'this curious and scarce legend' (1928 cited in Child, 2003, n.p.) is meticulously traced by Francis James Child (2003) in his five-volume study *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. The original broadside upon which subsequent revisions are based, variant A in Child's catalogue, appeared in print as early as 1685, and introduces an ominous theme that inheres in the eight ballads collectively called here, for ease of reference, 'The Daemon Lover'. Instructively titled, the full heading of the broadsheet A, as published in the *Pepys Ballads* in 1689 and reprinted in Child, encapsulates the basic plot:

> A Warning for Married Women, being an example of Mrs Jane Reynolds (a West-country woman), born near Plymouth, who having plighted her troth to a Seaman, was afterwards married to a carpenter, and at last carried away by a Spirit, the manner how shall presently be recited. (Child, 2003, n.p.)

[48] Catalogued as numbers 243 and 39 respectively in Francis James Child's 1892 collection of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.

[49] Scobie would almost certainly have been aware of Bob Dylan's version 'The House Carpenter', recorded in 1961. According to Ricou (2005), Scobie's 'favourite twentieth-century balladeer is Bob Dylan, about whom he has written both a serial poem, and forget my name (1999), and a biography Alias Bob Dylan (1991; rev. 2001)' (p. 1409).

Child points out that 'each of the versions B–F adds something which is taken up by a successor or successors'. The supernatural nature of the Seaman is depicted in varying degrees, and this 'revenant', as characterised by Child, ranges from A's 'Spirit' to what he describes as the 'even tamer' mariner in B (apparently mortal as he drowns with the woman); the vengeful cuckold in C (whose expressly punitive motivation Child would preferred to have seen maintained in subsequent iterations); and an ambiguous (yet equally vengeful – he throws the woman overboard) 'weird seaman' in D. Identifying the man as a daemon lover in their titles, E–G imbue the mariner with an 'eery personality' and, with what Child terms 'a sort of vulgar rationalism, turn him into the devil' (2003, n.p.).

Regarding F, the variant revised and first published by Walter Scott in the 1812 edition of his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Scott's correspondent and fellow ballad-hunter William Laidlaw paraphrases the rendition he had heard recited of a 'very beautiful ballad':

> As a punishment for her inconstancy, the Devil is supposed to come and entice a young woman from her husband, in the form of her former lover. The tune is very solemn and melancholy, and the effect is mixed with a considerable proportion of horror. (1803 cited in Child 2003)

Although in Scobie's *Ballad* that horror is muted, Isabel is a knowing meta-textual interpreter of the legend she inhabits. Hearing the siren-like 'silkies singing' a 'song […] meant for [her]', 'it scarcely mattered who he was, John Scarth' (p. 9).[50] Ideal HBC material, Scarth is 'reliable, solid, and dour', one of those men who can 'wait out the winter […] / dull inside themselves, like bears' (p. 10) – rather more animal than daemon. Nonetheless, 'all the tales he'd told to woo' Isabel, of a frigid Canadian winter (and the impressive 'thirty-two pounds a year' he is paid to endure it), have an unanticipated effect when she, herself, wants to sail away with him (pp. 10–12); this seduction echoes 'The Daemon Lover' and Scarth's embodied animalism subtly references the shapeshifting motif found in variant A:

[50] Isabel's situating herself within the ballad realm calls to mind Elspeth Barker's 1992 novel *O Caledonia*, in which the protagonist Janet disastrously summons her own daemon lover – in Timothy C. Baker's reading of *O Caledonia*, 'the external world and the actions of the people within it are simultaneously clarified in relation to, and constrained by, the ballad tradition' (2017, p. 200).

When he had told her these fair tales,
To love him she began,
Because he was in human shape,
Much like unto a man. (A.27)[51]

Utopias, per Foucault, are 'fundamentally unreal spaces' in which real sites are 'simultaneously represented, contested and inverted' (1986, p. 24). John Scarth's romanticised tales of Canada echo the instances in which the Daemon Lover tempts the woman by offering to 'show [her] how the lilies grow / On the banks o' Italy (C.16.3–4); the inducements for the woman to come away with him and leave behind her 'young ship-carpenter' and 'little son' (B.4.3–4) – or 'three sweet pretty babes' (A.29.3) or her 'ain two babes' (F.8.3), as the case may be – include seven ships laden to the brim with gold, velvet-lined gold slippers, a chair of gold, music and mariners to wait upon her, limitless wealth and, in C, the prospect of a stopover at 'Rose Isle' before venturing to the 'far countrie' (19.3–4). Isabel is yet to meet her own ship-carpenter, but the faraway land is a metonymy for all such touristic enticements: 'on a map, James Bay / hangs from the southern end of Hudson, an udder from a cow' (p. 21). Canada, in this pragmatic homespun metaphor, is figuratively and literally a resource to be milked, and the utopian imagery hints at its heterotopian counter site: milk, according to Diane Purkiss, is the preferred food of fairies, often given in payment for services rendered (2001, p. 153).[52]

Evocative of the Daemon's 'Beautiful to behold' spell upon the woman in which he 'cast[s] a glamour oer her face' that shines 'like the brightest gold' (E.8), Isabel's seducer himself succumbs to an enchantment:

on the desolate shores of the Davis Strait
his soul was claimed away from me, John Scarth,
as if by a horn-book devil: at night I could see
the tall green curtains of light in the sky
dance in his eyes like a midsummer's fire (p. 20)

[51] The 'Daemon Lover', 'Tam Lin' and 'Johnie Cocke' excerpts here come from Child's compendium (2003) and are identified by the variant's letter (A through H), then stanza and line number: ie. '"F.1.4" refers to variant F, stanza 1, line 4' – example per Håvard Nørjordet's reference system (2005, p. 26).

[52] 'One of the standard fairies of English folklore is the brownie, or hob, a household spirit that helps housewives, or more often servants, with their work in exchange for food, usually a bowl of milk or cream. A striking number of witches' helpers also demanded milk as payment for their services' (Purkiss, 2001, p. 153).

Scobie combines elements pulled from several variants of 'The Daemon Lover' and permits himself some 'shuffling' of the traditional ballad's timelines to align his adaptation with the actual history of Isobel Gunn, as well as working in several pointedly revisionist inversions. The first of these reversals in the *Ballad* occurs when, with seeming reluctance, Scarth abets Isabel in executing her strategy of disguise. Recounting her desire to escape the Orcadian status quo of 'a land where the men go to sea / and the women wait, and the women grow old', Isabel claims her own agency in an adamant refutation of 'all the stories' that will have told how she was 'seduced' and 'debauched' (pp. 11–12) – stories implicitly drawn from 'The Daemon Lover', where the woman is 'delud[ed] away' from home by the revenant mariner (B.13.4).[53]

In Scobie's version the traditional periods of the mariner's seven-year disappearance and the woman's three-year wait for his return are mere echoes and events are accelerated. As in 'The Daemon Lover', where after sailing 'a league but barely three' the woman observes his 'cloven foot', dismal countenance, and 'drumlie ee', prompting her to weep 'right bitterlie' (F.10–11), the estrangement between Scarth and Isabel begins upon departure from Orkney:

> with his hands so hard on the ship's cold rail
> his bones stood white as that ice-bound coast
> at which he stared and stared
> with a look in his eyes I did not
> as yet understand: but was later to learn
> quite simply, was love. (p. 19)

Isabel attributes their sleeping apart on ship to Scarth's revulsion now that she has 'become a man' (p. 21). In the midst of her first bleak Canadian winter she learns that this emotional abandonment, which he rationalises as a 'snow-blind' infatuation with Canada, is less fancifully explained by the existence of a Chipewyan wife; after reading aloud from the Dear John (that is, John Fubbister) letter in which John Scarth advises Isabel that his arms 'are

[53] In his study of the James Harris figure in Shirley Jackson's story collection *The Lottery*, Håvard Nørjordet cites Toni Reed's conclusion that '[t]he demon-lover motif has recurred through the ages because it demonstrates the power of men as well as the powerlessness of women and serves as a warning to women who would assert themselves' (1986 cited in 2005, p. 122), but elsewhere Nørjordet complicates the essentialism of this position, suggesting that 'James Harris could also be an illusion shaped and projected by human subjects whose desire makes their own personalities disintegrate; they are splitting, re-creating and re-naming themselves to accommodate Harris's manipulative strategies' (2005, fn. 18).

filled with shadows' and to wait patiently for him until spring, Scarth's reluctant ventriloquist James Brown provides a blunt interpretation:

> I do not know her name. He has had her
> for three years now. That is why he returned
> from Orkney. They had two children, boys,
> but both died young, within their first winters.
> She watched his hand as he wrote your letter.
> He smiled at her when he fixed its seal. (pp. 29–30)

This account of the 'country wife' mirrors an obverse Daemon Lover story, that of the *other* other woman, a kind of Jane Eyre finds out about Bertha' moment grounded in historical reality: such cohabitation between Company men and Indigenous women is characterised by Dorota Filipczak as 'the pattern in the imperial colonies spawned by western fantasies of power translated into sexual terms' (2018, p. 432).[54]

After this shocking revelation comes a hard season among men 'dangerous as bears', a Company in the grip of unbelievable cold and hibernating 'like animals' – after dreaming of Orkney, Isabel awakes with 'the tear-drops turning / to splinters of ice stabbing into [her] skin' (p. 33). The following March brings 'two great events': her short-lived fling with David Spence Junior, interrupted by her tense reunion with John Scarth (p. 34). Alan Riach notes that in the Daemon Lover tradition 'the pain and consequence of too ready trust and absolute betrayal cut deep' (2017, p. 78), and, indeed, in A and B it is the cuckolded ship-carpenter whose grief is emphasised:

> He beat his breast, he tore his hair,
> The tears fell from his eyes,
> And in the open streets he run
> With heavy doleful cries. (A.30)

In the *Ballad* it is Isabel's ship-carpenter, the 'coin' paid against the daemon lover John Scarth's 'account', who will leave *her*, but not before roaring with laughter at Isabel's disguise of face-blacking and furs when they first meet; upon Scarth's return, Davie laughs at her again, 'as if / he'd stumbled onto something lost, and true' (p. 36). It is 'laughing Davie' who writes 'John' Fubbister ('how hard [he] laugh[s] to write it') with the alluring offer of a

[54] I refer to Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*, and the moment Jane discovers during her wedding to Mr. Rochester that he is already married to Bertha Mason, the 'madwoman in the attic' – a racially othered other woman Rochester met in the West Indies (2006, ch. 26).

marital home in Québec ‘grander by far than anything seen in Fife or Orkney’ and advises her to ‘forget that surly brute’ (p. 41). And it is David Spence Junior, ‘a rogue, insubordinate devil’, who will drown when a river boat overturns, leaving Isabel disconsolate, pregnant and alone (p. 46).

a kind of tax for living here, you pay
with parts of your body

The ballads serve a ‘didactic purpose’ in their portrayal of enduring human truths (Riach, 2017, pp. 77–79), and this didacticism is another element shared by the documentary poem. In Dorothy Livesay’s original conception of the genre, these narratives ‘are not told for the tale’s sake or for the myth’s sake: The story is a frame on which to hang a theme’ (1969 cited in Kamboureli, 1991, p. 43). The *Ballad* narrates the taxing effects of a harsh environment upon the migrant body, and a central theme is ‘labour’: labour as work, as childbirth, and as commodity. To return to Kenneth Hoeppner’s point that Isabel conceptualises her sexual relationships with images of exchange, Davie Spence – whose surname is an amalgam of ‘spend’ and ‘pence’ – in this construct is an emotional commodity hedged against John Scarth’s infidelity. When Davie leaves her, ‘the charge / could be repaid by flipping that same coin’, but the bitter reunion with Scarth offers diminishing returns and their intercourse is a form of indentureship: ‘We laboured at making love, like miners / bound to a dangerous, ill-paid job’ (pp. 36–37).

In another of the *Ballad’s* inversions of the Daemon Lover template, Scarth makes good on the promised gold, paying a fine void of emotional capital when Isabel gives birth to a son they both know is not his:

> But now that I was a woman again
> the story required a seducer, a man
> who had made me his victim: so for his shame
> and mine, John Scarth laid down
> a purse of coins beside my bed, and went. (p. 51)[55]

[55] In an implicitly unfavourable comparison of Scobie’s poem to Audrey Thomas’s 1999 ‘historical feminist novel’ *Isabel Gunn*, Dorota Filipczak’s reductive summary that it ‘revolves around the motif of female devotion, self-sacrifice and spurned love’ (2018, p. 432) disregards the poetic Isabel’s emphatic rejection of the assumption that she let Scarth ‘lead [her] along/like a goat on a hank of old rope’ (Scobie, 1987, p. 12), and overlooks Isabel’s own motivating desires.

Constrained by the economy of the ballad world, their exchange is modelled upon the bargain struck by the Daemon Lover who offers the woman wealth to come away with him then defaults on the deal: 'What, weep you for my gold?' he said, / 'Or do you weep for my fee? (B.9.3–4) The use of 'fee' here is ambiguous. The cost to the woman and the cause of her grief is leaving behind her little son, but the ultimate tariff is the woman's life (and, in B, the mariner's own life as well) when the ship sinks and she drowns. In this context, 'fee' can be classed with other instances of 'tribute' to the devil found in balladry. Wimberly (1965) traces the function and origin of 'human sacrifice' in the ballads 'Tam Lin' and 'Thomas Rymer':

> As a consequence of having at stated intervals to pay this tax, tithe, or teind to hell, the fairies, so it was formerly believed in Scotland, were accustomed to abduct earthly folk, whom they offered up as a tribute to the fiend.
> (pp. 323–24)

One of the historical documents included in the *Ballad* is an image from the actual HBC account books of 1806 that records a payment of one pound and four shillings from John Fubbister to James Brown. As his name suggests, this minor character shares qualities with one of the 'significant types' of fairy in Diane Purkiss's classificatory system:

> 1. Brownies, hobs and familiars; live in one house or serve one person, and overlap with
> 2. Fairy guides; often dead; conduct a person to fairies and/or teach them fairy lore.
> 3. Fairy societies; seen in fairy world or on ride; include king and queen.
> 4. Poltergeist/demon fairies, eventually melt down into tricksters; overlap with 1.
> (2001, p. 8)

If Scarth meets the criteria to be classed as a 'demon fairy', Brown the brownie qualifies as a benevolent one – as Purkiss explains, 'Scottish fairy guides are usually kin to the person they guide', and brownies, 'like slaves, did household and farm chores in exchange for enough food to stay alive; a bowl of milk or cream was the usual payment' (2001, pp. 155, 213). Isabel's 'countryman' Brown is her protector and messenger, and for his service the environment exacts a toll, 'three toes / [lost] to the frostbite' that John Scarth will 'throw into the Eastmain River' (p. 29). Isabel makes her own compensation with what remains of her own wages: 'A guinea for carrying the letters, / I thought, and a shilling for each of his toes' (p. 30). The gruesome offering tossed into the river foreshadows the drowning to follow, and in keeping with tradition, where 'the fiend prefers one who is fat and healthy' (Wimberly 1965, p. 325), Davie Spence – in the full flush of youth and well-liked by his fellows – is the

tithe paid to hell, and a tax on the Hudson's Bay Company, human capital the cost of doing business.

Winter became our world, the enclosure
of cold that knew no outer limit but the wind

Isabel, inducted into the Company and passing by virtue of her ability to work like a man, in this schema is a 'Type 3' fairy – a member of a particular society, one of the Fairy Crown's troop. Of the various heterotopias Foucault identifies, colonies are 'extreme types'; he instances Puritan and Jesuit religious communities in 'the first wave of colonization' that functioned as partitioned 'heterotopias […] of compensation', terrestrial spaces partitioned from disorganised sites of human life (1986, p. 27). Though the *Ballad's* colony of HBC men is transient, its partitions are porous but real:

> When the winter comes, you mustn't sleep
> with your head to the wall; the wall is where
> outside begins. (p. 27)

In religious heterotopias, orderly regulation functions as the compensatory element, and, in the Company, such compensation appears in the rhythm of labour. Interior space, an inhospitable Arctic realm where sheets freeze hard as boards and the factor's wine turns to red ice, has shifted from the autumnal outdoors, where the men sing a work anthem around their temporary hearth, a campfire 'inside the great dark': 'But we'll shoot red deer and we'll eat their tongues / Haul away, there's nothing better' (p. 26). Again, the song borrows from an older one, with several versions gathered in Child under the title 'Johnie [Johny] Cock':

> He 'as taen out the little pen-knife,
> 'T was full three quarters long,
> And he has taen out of that dun deer
> The liver bot and the tongue.
>
> They eat of the flesh, and they drank of the blood,
> And the blood it was so sweet,
> Which caused Johny and his bloody hounds
> To fall in a deep sleep. (A.8.3–4).[56]

[56] Child ([1892] 2003) attributes his source for Version A of 'Johnie Cock' to Thomas Percy: 'Communicated to Percy by Miss Fisher, of Carlisle, 1780, No 5 of MS.'

Here, Johny's outdoor party is composed of loyal hounds. Despite Johny's drinking the deer's blood, which fortifies him with strength to foil his enemies, Lowrey Charles Wimberley says of this ballad that 'there is nothing here of the supernatural' yet adds the suggestive afterthought that in Norse balladry blood-drinking 'effects restoration of enchanted mortals to human form.' (1965, p. 74).

The *Ballad* offers other persuasions that the HBC voyageurs are trapped inside Fairyland. Scobie's repeated use of animal motifs to depict this society continues a time-honoured trend of hirsute fairies: as Diane Purkiss puts it, 'there's something quite hairy about fairies, they're often described in hairy terms' (keynote 2021). David MacRitchie, in his euhemeristic anthropological study of fairies, *Testimony of Tradition* (1890), would concur, as the term 'shaggy' as applied to a 'race' of hairy people featured in Highland lore 'is a synonym for a "brownie"' (p. 159). Celtic fairies are particularly associated with hunting deer, and MacRitchie recounts a folkloric theme wherein fairy troops are 'privileged' hunters with exclusive land rights, often for periods ending on Halloween (pp. 98–99). The HBC have claimed a similar privilege in their fur-trapping enterprise, and that the shivering men are robed in heavy pelts makes it easy for Isabel to hide in plain sight: [57]

> We huddled in furs, gathering round us
> the skin of our commerce. Marten and fox,
> beaver and mooseskin: small fortunes in London
> we wore on our backs. (p. 27)

Interleaved in this image of humans wrapped in animal skin is a more sinister implication. Purkiss notes a strand of ballad lore wherein a sense of ownership regarding fairy captives reveals a 'thin to vanishing point line between human and cattle' with 'mortals being the fairies' cattle' (2021). Stephen Scobie has tapped into a vein of fairy literature that, according to Purkiss, proliferated in the sixteenth century just as the English slave trade began: like the slave, 'the fairy advances his master's social position by apparent sleight of hand; the wealth he produces is unearned (2001, pp. 210–11). Of the men who left Orkney to work for the HBC, the Reverend Francis Liddell wrote:

> Instead of offering an honourable service to their King and country, or staying at home to cultivate their lands, and protect their wives, their children, and

[57] '[T]he animal form of the English familiars […] recalls the English hob's fondness for animal-skin clothing, and for suits of leather, also an animal hide' (Purkiss, 2001, p. 155).

> their parents, for the sum of £6 per annum hire themselves out for slaves in a savage land. (1799, cited in Towrie, ©2004, 'The Stromness Connection', para. 6)

This 'savage land' in the *Ballad* is figured as an otherworldly Arctic hell and the 'slaves' as enchanted mortals:

> boys who left home without even a beard
> and returned with three hard winters driven
> into their skins by the Hudson's Bay.
> We called them the Nor-wasters, and their eyes
> had turned into the vacant blue of ice. (p. 8)

The three-year terms undertaken by these 'Otherworld itinerants' (Wimberly's apt descriptor) who have been emptied rather than enriched by their indenture, reflect standard contractual language of the ballad tradition in describing 'periods of service, absence, penance, and so on' (1965, pp. 108, 329). Isabel, who herself leaves Orkney as a beardless boy – 'a strong and sturdy lad' who speaks in 'whispers' – enters such a contract by making 'his mark on the line, a deeply scratched X / beside his name: John Fubbister' (p. 13).

Then Geddes welcomed the boy aboard,
shaking my hand so hard I nearly cried

Wimberley observes the balladry's preservation of a universal primitive belief that a person's spirit, personality or power is 'bound up with' and 'present in' his or her name (1965, p. 84). Further, names have power to enchant or charm, and the example provided by Wimberley is of the ballad hero Tam Lin,[58] who is cut off from his home when abducted by elves and assigned an 'unearthly' name:

> 'First they did call me Jack,' he said,
> 'and then they called me John,
> But since I lived in the fairy court
> Tomlin has always been my name.' (D.9)

This name magic holds Jack/John/Tam Lin under an enchantment, yet also grants him status as 'a naturalised member of the fairy community' (Wimberley, 1965, p. 88). Isabel, likewise, is initiated into the male world of the HBC when she boards the *Prince of Wales* and signs on

[58] Also known as Tomlin, Tam-a-line, or Tam Lane.

as ‘John’ – a historical happenstance that, along with other striking congruencies between ‘Tam Lin’ and the documented facts of Isobel Gunn’s life, Stephen Scobie deftly parlays into an echoing narrative of entrancement, unwed pregnancy, adventure, and disenchantment.

As with ‘The Daemon Lover’, there are numerous iterations of the old Scottish ballad commonly known as ‘Tam Lin’ mustered under that collective heading in Volume I of Francis James Child’s compendium. And, as with ‘The Daemon Lover’, the narrative comes with a warning, aimed in this instance at *un*married women. In six of the nine Child versions a caution dispensed in the first verse expressly forbids all maidens to come or go ‘by Carterhaugh’ (A,B,H and I; ‘Chaster’s wood’ in D and ‘Charter’s woods’ in G) where young Tam Lin is waiting to collect their ‘wad’ or pledge; the cost of defying this prohibition will be ‘their rings, or green mantles, / Or else their maidenhead.’ (A.1.3–4). The poem then introduces a feisty young woman named Janet, Jennet, or Lady Margaret, who, insistent on her right of access, falls pregnant after the inevitable sexual encounter with Tam Lin, which is depicted in terms ranging from suggestive to explicit. In C, E, and F, the warning is retrospectively implied, and the seduction or rape scene elided, with the action commencing when Janet revisits Carterhaugh – ‘Kertonha’, ‘Charteris ha’, or ‘Chester wood’, respectively – to be reunited with her lover Tam Lin.

The story, in essence, is that Tam Lin has been captured by the Fairy Queen and taken ‘in yon green hill to dwell’ (A.23.6). The looming expiration of a seven-year stint in these ‘pleasant’ elfin lands means the obligatory tithe to hell is coming due: ‘I am sae fair and fu o flesh, / I’m feard it be mysel’ (A. 24.5–6). This danger precipitates his bargain with Janet, that if she helps him regain his human identity – one of privilege and title – he will be her worldly mate. The variants adhere to a consistent recipe for his release: Janet must wait at a specified hour – typically midnight, sometimes on Halloween – for the fairy host to ride through a crossroads (usually Miles Cross but in other instances Blackning Cross, Blackstock, or Chester Bridge). Here, she must pull Tam Lin from his milk-white steed and hold him tightly as he metamorphoses through a series of shapes – bear, greyhound, adder, wolf, etc., even a red-hot iron bar – until he is himself again, a ‘naked knight’ or ‘mother-naked man’ (A, B).

The plot’s emphasis on entry tolls and exit spells demonstrates another principle of heterotopology, that heterotopias operate under a ‘system of opening and closing that both

isolates them and makes them penetrable'; unless entry is compulsory, such as imprisonment, '[t]o get in one must have a certain permission' and in some cases 'submit to rites and purifications' (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). In 'Tam Lin', ingress requires either defloration or abduction, and the charm for egress requires a ritualistic purification:

> First dip me in a stand of milk,
> And then in a stand of water;
> Haud me fast let me na gae,
> I'll be your bairnie's father (B.34)

In A, B, G and I, Janet's return trip to Carterhaugh is prefaced by a dramatisation of the court's anxiety about the unborn child's paternity, as voiced by of one of her father's retainers, an 'auld grey knight': 'Alas, fair Janet for thee / But we'll be blamed a' (A.11.3–4). That same anxiety is neatly grafted onto Scobie's riff 'Dainty Davie': '*It's who will answer what he's wrocht*?' (p. 36). In the *Ballad's* improvised song, Davie swears he'll marry the singer, and his counterpart David Spence is cast in dual roles, that of the ship's carpenter in 'The Daemon Lover', and as an avatar of his progenitor 'Tam Lin'.

As 'an earthly knight' (A.29.3), and the bonniest or bravest knight of the company, Tam Lin enjoys renown among the fairies, and informs Janet he is of noble birth – heir to an earl's, knight's or laird's wealth – but before helping him escape the elfin lands Janet makes him swear that he is who he says. In G, her question 'What pedigree are you?' (23.4) is precursor to a peerage review:

> O I hae been at gude church-door
> An I've got Christendom
> I'm the Earl o'Forbes eldest son
> An heir ower a' his land. (G.24)

This version includes a negotiation, with Tam Lin asserting that despite an elfin appearance he is an 'earthly' man of status, and promising that their unborn child, if a 'knave-bairn', will be his 'heir', and if a 'lass-bairn' will receive 'red gowd' (G.20–22).

David Spence writes Isabel with an offer echoing Tam Lin's: after 'one winter more' of 'God-forsaken ice and bogs' he'll start a business in Quebec and build a grand house fit for a 'wife and family' (p. 41). Isabel, like Janet, has also done a background check:

Davie was sent to school
and meant to be a minister, but that could never
have been his way, for all that he wore
neat satin waistcoats, kept his linen clean
even on Hudson Bay. Oh, he could drink
[…]
but yet there was a delicacy in him:
he paid me court as if I were a lady
as fine in crinoline in any banker's niece
or a boat-builder's daughter. (p. 35)

David Spence, like Tam Lin, is cut from a more gentlemanly cloth than his fellows. However, unlike Tam Lin, David Spence is blithely unaware of the tax on his head, and his plotline ends prematurely when his boat overturns – a dip into dramatic irony – with his own repatriation to the mortal world taking the form of a riverbank burial. Parcelled up among his effects, a 'satin waistcoat' is shipped home to his father in Scotland, a pyrrhic marker of class among a cargo of animal hides (pp. 46–47).

In the *Ballad of Isabel Gunn* it is the elderly retainer – John Scarth, veteran Company man – who grudgingly answers to fathering Isabel's son. And it is Scarth, the daemon lover, who takes Isabel's toll in the form of her maidenhead, but it is the recruiter Geddes – proxy for the Royal HBC, which in turns stands for the Fairy Queen – who collects her pledge and transports her to Canada.

When you sail the North Atlantic
You sail a sea of ice

Another 'extreme' form of heterotopia is the ship, 'heterotopia par excellence' – in 'civilisations without boats', claims Foucault, 'dreams dry up' (1986, p. 27). The *Prince of Wales* is a floating synecdoche for the Crown, sailing into a 'vacancy' where the 'land-locked shapes that determined [Isabel's] life' have receded (p. 17). Nested inside what she disdainfully terms the 'princely' ship's 'claustrophobic enclosure' is the intimate space of Isabel and Scarth, simultaneously 'closed as a seashell, yet / as vast and grand as Canada' (p. 18). As Wimberley observes, 'Otherworld itinerants must cross some sort of water barrier, a river or the sea' (1965, p. 110). This particular ship is an extension of, and a bridge to, the new world's 'ice-bound coast' (p. 19). In 'The Daemon Lover', apart from the initial seduction of the married woman by the mariner, the poem is set entirely onboard and the ship is the site of dreams, disillusion, and death. On the voyage the woman spies a mountain

‘dreary wi frost and snow’ and the mariner spitefully advises her that this (and not the promised utopia of Rose Island) is their destination, ‘the mountain of hell’ (F.13).

Isabel is headed for the same place. Fort Albany in summer is a mirage-like palisade, visible upon approach ‘as if through a haze, a shimmering grey / distortion in the air’ (p. 25). The instant Isabel and her fellow conscripts step ashore under a sun ‘already fading at noon’ they are beset by biting sand-flies and their skins run with blood; bleakly jesting about biblical plagues, ‘we laughed’, reports Isabel, ‘as best we could, like souls / on their first day in hell’ (p. 25). They have arrived at Company Headquarters, known in the ballad realm as the Fairy Court. The idea that the heterotopia ‘is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place […] several sites that are in themselves incompatible’ (Foucault, 1986, p. 25) neatly coheres in the title of the first published version of ‘Tam Lin’: among versions A through I – variously named for the hero Young Tam Lane, Tomaline, Tam-a-Line the Elfin Knight or The Knight of Faerylande*,* etc. – it is C, David Herd’s fragment ‘Kertonha, or The Fairy Court’ (1769, p. 300, cited in Child, n.p), that foregrounds a geospatial simultaneity of the real and the supernatural.[59]

Substituting *Canada* for the uncannily assonant placeholder *Kertonha* would make an equally on-point title for Scobie’s *Ballad.* In ‘Tam Lin’, the liminal or wild zone Miles Cross is the designated site of disenchantment, and in the *Ballad* Isabel’s disillusionment and metamorphosis is triggered in a northern wasteland. The most *unheimlich* moment in the poem occurs when Isabel, realising she is pregnant, leaves the warmth of the campfire and walks ‘far inland’ […] ‘into that barren waste / of rock and muskeg, melting snow’ (p. 39). Here, in this interior no-man’s land distant from the transient dwellings of the fur-traders, Isabel comes to the crossroads that precipitates her own retransition to female form. The process commences with a lament that references a similar crisis point in ‘The Daemon Lover’:

[59] The ‘Tam Lin’ composers would likely have understood that Carterhaugh is a real place: ‘Carterhaugh is a plain at the confluence of the Ettrick with the Yarrow, scarcely an English mile above the town of Selkirk, and on this plain they show two or three rings on the ground, where, they say, the stands of milk and water stood, and upon which grass never grows ‘ (Glenriddell MS, vol. xi, No 17, 1791 cited in Child, n.p.).

‘O gentle death, come cut my breath,
I may be dead ere morn!
I may be buried in Scottish ground,
Where I was bred and born!’ (C.18)

Isabel indulges in the same immigrant’s nostalgia for the old country, its permanence symbolised by her memory of Orkney’s rocky geography; in an extremity of homesickness, she scrubs her face with dirt as if attempting to literally *ground* herself:

I would long for my windswept islands,
I would search in vain for the standing stones,
I would kneel and scour my cheeks with the earth
that was not Orkney. (p. 39)

In the ballad realm Isabel inhabits, one in which she ‘became’ John Fubbister the moment she boarded a Canada-bound ship, she is now separated from both name and place, and the ‘land-locked shapes’ that informed her identity literally and metaphorically ‘disintegrated’ as they receded from her vantage point on the ship (p. 37).

In theorising ‘place-identity’, Harold Proshansky *et al* (1983) propose that an individual’s ‘environmental past’ provides data for validation of ‘his or her own continuity’ via ‘stability of place and space’ – specifically, what is termed the ‘recognition function’ (p. 66):

> One implication of the recognition function of place-identity is that extreme variations in the physical environment experienced by a person may indeed threaten the self-identity of the individual. (Proshansky *et al*, 1983, p. 66)

Germaine to a reading of Isabel’s deranged demonstration of grief, and the meaning of her unsettling interaction with an Indigenous family who appear in the barrens, then, is the relevance of the liminal space she has entered, the ‘*or’* between *Canada* and *Fairyland*.

I had stepped outside all scope of pity,
I had become unnameable

In the remote wasteland where Isabel retreats to contemplate the predicament of her pregnancy, out of range from the relative safety of camp, the actual ground is ‘melting’ beneath her feet and is as unstable and unnamable as Isabel / John. Smearing her face with earth is symptomatic of an existential disorder, and Isabel’s dérangerment repurposes that of

Janet in 'Tam Lin': [60] looking 'pale and wan' and ceasing to 'comb her yellow hair', the cause of Janet's 'sair sickness' is soon construed by the court to mean that she has 'been with some leman' (I.12–13.1). It is in this *un*settled, de/ranged state that Isabel becomes aware of the ghostly 'Indian family' silently regarding her, and she likens the dirt on her face to 'warpaint' (p. 39). Despite Isabel's masculine disguise of buffalo robes, 'the woman [understands her] sickness' (p. 39) (which sickness, though? and what kind of understanding? Isabel's morning sickness is also *mourning* sickness, and the family's spectral fading away images a comparable loss of Indigenous place-identity as an effect of settler colonialism).

The idea that geospatial data informs one's sense of selfhood is also key to Foucault's conception of the 'mirror' function between heterotopias and utopias, a coeval junction between 'real' and 'absolutely unreal' sites where the self is reconstituted: 'Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself […] where I am' (1986, p. 24). When Isabel cries out *Stromness*! – a place instead of a name – this strange utterance might be construed as a battle cry (the man holds a blood-smeared knife), a statement of solidarity (she, like the family observing her, is indigenous to a space impacted by empire), or the magic word that releases her from an enchantment: by invoking the name of her birthplace, Stromness, Isabel dispels her seducer John Scarth's hold over her: 'the contest between us was over' (p. 39). It is in the heterotopic mirror, Fairyland reflected in the failed utopia of Canada, that she returns to herself.

This blankness, this despair, this final
Canada

In the *Ballad* the metamorphosis story is displaced onto Isabel, whose de-transition reverses Tam Lin's restoration to a 'mother-naked man'. When her labour pains start, Isabel must 'escape from / the Company' and departs Fairyland for the 'mortal snows' of Pembina, where she gives birth on the floor of the astonished Factor's residence (p. 50). Mr. Henry's florid description of Isabel's dis/clothes/ure might have been lifted directly from Mathew Lewis's

[60] Origin late eighteenth-century French *déranger*, from Old French *desrengier*, literally 'move from orderly rows'. Etymology available from: https://www.etymonline.com/word/derange [Accessed 26th June 2023].

The Monk (1796):[61] the 'poor, helpless abandoned wretch, who was not of the sex I had supposed […] opened her jacket, and displayed a pair of beautiful, round white breasts' (p. 50). The final step of disenchantment in the *Ballad* is not a ritual dip in milk but Isabel's demotion to laundry woman and 'washing for all hands, / which indeed she is no Witch at' (p. 53).

Isabel is now a 'freak', the 'object of salacious' stories (p. 53), and her ontological disenchantment is not a rebirth; the 'mortal snows' signify a human realm, and a realm of death. When she returns to Orkney – on the same ship she set out on three years earlier – she returns a revenant, much like the mariner of 'The Daemon Lover':

> Mother and child turned vagabond
> on the roads of Orkney: no kin to receive me,
> James Brown gone south in search of work
> and every eye closed on me like a door. (p. 57)

The society open to Isabel Gunn, and where she reclaims her true name (the one that will appear on the real Isobel's death certificate in 1861),[62] is located 'inside the walls of the Maeshowe tomb' where she shakes hands and speaks with unseen spirits who lived there 5,000 years earlier (p. 58). This site exemplifies what Foucault calls a 'heterochrony', a heterotopic space that breaks with traditional time, for instance, 'the cemetery' – a 'quasi-eternity in which [the individual's] permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance' (1986, p. 26).

If David MacRitchie's architectural drawings and pseudo-anthropological surmises in his 1890 *Testimony of Tradition* are to be credited, the Maeshowe Mound is as much a fairy habitat as the green hill where Tam Lin dwells. That a burial mound can be a fairy heterotopia is fitting, since, as Diane Purkiss says of 'ancient' archetypal fairies, they 'have links with the dead, and some are the dead' (2001, p. 48). Isabel is now one of the icy-eyed

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[61] A similar gender-reveal occurs in Matthew Lewis' (1796) Gothic novel, when the identity of Matilda in disguise as a monk is uncovered: 'She had torn open her habit, and her bosom was half exposed. […] And Oh! that was such a breast! The Moonbeams darting full upon it enabled the Monk to observe its dazzling whiteness. His eye dwelt with insatiable avidity upon the beauteous Orb' (Chp. II, n.p.).

[62] In 'The Unknown Isobel Gunn', Tom Muir speculates that Isobel is 'buried in Warbeth kirkyard in an unmarked, pauper's grave' (©2017–2023, A poignant ending, para. 2).

‘Nor-wasters’ who returns from the otherworld ordeal impoverished rather than enriched, a revenant recognized only by otherworld citizens like herself. Stephen Scobie’s innovative iteration of ‘The Daemon Lover’ / ‘Tam Lin’ demonstrates how actors constrained by the economy of the ballad world are mirrored in colonial history, and how the didactive function of the ballad is borne out, with Isabel’s story serving as a warning.

Chapter 3: Defrosting the Gothic: Arctic Poetry in a Melting Sublime

> The green leaf looks back, and sees
> a man walking out in this shuddering light
> to the sound of air under the ice,
> out onto the lake, among sun-cups,
> snow penitents: a drowned man, waked
> in this weathering ground.
>
> 'Signs on a White Field', Robin Robertson (2010)

(Arctic) Sublime

This chapter traces Gothicised conceptions of the north as a sublime geographical space and argues that as the climate crisis affects material changes on the formerly frozen-solid Arctic, the north as a literary setting is also evolving, from an imaginary domain of unknown terror to one of horror laid bare. I focus on poetry by British and Canadian poets whose work engages with the Arctic, including contemporary poetry I classify as ecoGothic within the context of global heating. Integrating into my analysis Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's monster theory and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias, I propose that the lexicon of Arctic tropes must be revised to include an emergent category of Gothic sublime – a concept responsive to the alteration of northern landscapes as they literally melt into something not before seen.

The Arctic has traditionally been represented as a sublimely terrifying geographical space in Gothic literature, and the vast and impenetrable north is a thrillingly familiar destination – recall Victor Frankenstein hunting, and being haunted by, his monster, the duo travelling northward through the 'desolate and appalling landscape' of the Orkneys to 'the wilds of Tartary and Russia' (Shelley, 2008, pp. 164, 203). Taunted by invitations the creature carves into tree bark and inscribes on stones, Frankenstein traces its snowy footsteps into 'the eternal frosts': 'Follow me', entices the monster, 'I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive' (Shelley, pp. 206, 204). Creature and creator, pursued and pursuer, the pair are sighted sledding across the icepack by Captain Robert Walton, whose ship is 'surrounded by mountains of ice which admit of no escape and threaten to […] crush [his] vessel' and whose crew is dropping from hypothermia (Shelley, p. 212). After Victor Frankenstein is brought onboard and himself

succumbs, the monster appears at his creator's deathbed and advises an aghast Walton that he will travel on an 'ice raft' to the 'most northern extremity of the globe' to burn himself to ashes on a 'funeral pile'; the thing then disappears forever into the icy wastes (Shelley, pp. 222–23).

The narrative frame of Walton's failed expedition was added to Frankenstein's ur-text in part as Mary Shelley's response to a manifesto in the 1816 *Quarterly Review* promoting John Franklin's planned 1818 four-ship quest to discover the North Pole and Northwest Passage, with Shelley both capitalising upon and critiquing Britain's 'Arctic Fever' (Craciun, 2016, pp. 83–85). These voyages captured the imagination of the British people, whose 'imagined Arctic was a place of terror' but also beautiful in a 'sublime way' (Loomis, 1977, p. 110). However, as Chauncy Loomis (1977) puts it, when Franklin – along with his prophetically named ships Terror and Erebus and their crews – failed to return from his 1845 expedition, the dream of conquest turned to nightmare when 'it became clear that the Arctic had swallowed him, obliterated him' (p. 107); after a six-year search, subsequent revelations about the grisly facts of the crews' deaths, including well-substantiated evidence of cannibalism, 'soured the romance' and 'subverted the image of the Arctic Sublime' (p. 110).

This conceptual spoiling in the public imagination was presaged by Gothic literature's 'significant revision of the eighteenth-century sublime', whose 'bold, but not prophetic' pictorial descriptions had 'confirm[ed] rather than challenge[d] the convictions of orthodox faith' (Morris, 1985, pp. 299–300). Vijay Mishra (1994) observes a similar turn in Walton's own descriptions of the Arctic cold, where awe turns to terror as his ship is engulfed by ice, and identifies this shift as the juncture in which 'Arctic' becomes yet another sublime to be added to a growing list (p. 214); Mishra argues that appending historical descriptors such as 'Romantic' or 'post-Kantian' to the word sublime fails to recognise that by its 'very nature […] it cannot be contained' (1994, p. 40). As David Morris (1985) has also acknowledged, the 'uncomfortable fact' is that there is no definitive 'essence of the sublime' (p. 300), nor is there space here to chart its historical development or attempt a fulsome definition. The term, originating from Longinus's Greek *hypsos* – typically translated as '"height," "elevation," and "loftiness"' (Doran, 2015, p. 23) – denotes both geographical and physical topoi as well as aesthetic or literary effects, and the emotions these produce in the viewer or reader.

Robert Doran (2015) credits English writer John Dennis with first identifying this 'nexus between sublimity and terror' in journal entries documenting Dennis's 1688 trip through the Alps[63] (p. 124):

> One Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produc'd different motions in me, viz. a delightful Horror, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled. (Dennis cited in Doran, p. 125)

Doran observes that Edmund Burke's 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* similarly promotes an aesthetic of amazement intermingled with terror, and that Burke's appropriation of the phrase 'delightful horror' is 'obviously redolent' of Dennis' original formulation (2015, p. 149). In addition to Burke providing Gothic novelists with a 'storehouse of approved and guaranteed terrors', Morris credits his *Philosophical Enquiry* with consolidating disparate accounts of the sublime into a system in which terror is the dominating principle (1985, p. 300). In setting forth categories of sublimity such as Terror, Vastness and Obscurity, Burke proposes:

> [t]o make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. (1757, p. 44)

Barbara Freeman (1987) notes that Immanuel Kant's own influential construct of the sublime, in his 1790 *Critique of Judgement*, is similarly 'bound up in a system of encasements, injunctions, and imperatives that function to protect the sublime' from its own 'monstrous potential' (p. 22): for instance, sublimity is 'produced by *colossal* but not *monstrous* representations of nature' (Kant, par. 26, p. 91, cited in Freeman, p. 22). Freeman convincingly reads Mary Shelley's novel as staging the impossibility of Kant's effort to compartmentalise 'the positive aspect of the sublime from its negative, destructive side'; Freeman's interpretation is bolstered with the telling observation that '[e]ach time a sublime landscape is depicted it is linked to the Monster's appearance' (1987, pp. 23–24).

Against Kant's insistence on a morally uplifting sublime, and against Burke's privileging of obscure terror, enter *Frankenstein*. As Mishra sees it, by 'writing about the

[63] Doran usefully distinguishes the 'sublime proper' as experienced by Dennis from the conjectural 'aesthetic sublime' theorised by Burke and Kant (2015, p. 269).

Monster, Mary Shelley also writes herself out of the positive Romantic sublime' (1994, p. 213). To clarify the preceding critical debate regarding the literary effects produced by terror versus the horrid – the former an aesthetic famously championed by Ann Radcliffe – perhaps Devendra P. Varma's (1957) earthy explanation puts it best: [64]

> [t]he difference between Terror and Horror is the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse. (p. 130)

Significantly, it is when Walton's vessel is imperilled by the negative sublime (in the form of immense, crushing structures of ice) that he encounters the monster, which has boarded his ship uninvited: a 'gigantic', 'loathsome', 'appalling', 'distorted' form whose 'vast hand' exhibits a 'colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy' (Shelley, p. 218). Walton's stumbling upon this animated corpse is a moment of decidedly *un*delightful, *un*obscured horror. Mary Shelley's writing herself out of the 'positive Romantic sublime' serves as a harbinger for the argument to follow – that, as the climate crisis effects material changes on the formerly frozen-solid Arctic, the *unheimlich* literary topography of the north must also change, from a site of obscure terror to one of exposed horror.

North

The Arctic wilderness has always been a good place to hide out in, to get lost in, or to get eaten in – a place to disappear. The fascination with the search for a passage through the Arctic maze of Canada's northern archipelago was shared by Canadians, and the Franklin disaster is an enduring leitmotif in literary imagery of the north (Atwood, 1995, p. 11). In her 1991 lecture series *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*, Margaret Atwood (1995) examines a classic theme of Canadian Literature, a fascination with 'being lost in the frozen north – and going crazy there' (p. 3). She concludes *Strange Things* with some 'bad news':

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[64] In her essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', published posthumously in 1826, Radcliffe's examination of the difference between horror and terror unfolds as a dialogue between 'two travellers in Shakespeare's native country' (editorial fn., pg. 145). Using as exemplars Banquo's ghost versus Hamlet's, 'W___' argues that the appearance of the former, though staged with a 'thrill of horror and surprise', results in a 'transient' and 'inferior' effect in comparison to the 'gloomy and sublime kind of terror' summoned in *Hamlet*; here, a 'union of grandeur and obscurity' is comparable to Mr. Burke's sublime, a 'tranquility tinged with terror' (1826, p. 150).

> the North is not endless. It is not vast and strong, and capable of devouring and digesting all the human dirt thrown its way. The holes in the ozone layer are getting bigger very year; […] erosion, pollution, and ruthless exploitation are taking their toll.
>
> The edifice of Northern imagery […] was erected on a reality; if that reality ceases to exist, the imagery, too, will cease to have any resonance or meaning. (1995, pp. 115–16)

While Atwood's remarks could not have anticipated the extent of environmental change to be wrought by global heating, her concern about the ozone layer now seems prophetic. Regarding what she terms a 'sublime' (proper) and 'timeless poetics of the Arctic space', Kirsten Hastrup (2013) echoes Atwood's warning, stating: 'It is the ice which holds together the environment, or – indeed – splits it up, and which provides the leitmotif of poetry, story and science;' the timelessness of these poetics will give way when 'environmental histories insert themselves' (pp. 58, 64).

Frankenstein's frosts are no longer eternal or everlasting. In the plainly stated opinion of poet Jean McNeil (2011), the marine Arctic has 'passed its point of no return' with sea ice levels rapidly diminishing due to global heating (p. 62). In Siberia, overwintering 'zombie fires' with a propensity to 'come back from the dead' spontaneously combust on permafrost peat bogs (BBC Newsround, n.d.) and sinkholes appear in the melting ground, with these portals to hell exposing Ice Age cadavers – the remains of long extinct creatures such as woolly mammoths, rhinos, cave lions and canids of the Pleistocene epoch. These exhumations have resulted in a black market in mammoth tusks, accompanied by the environmental degradation of riverbank ice-ivory extraction sites.

Gold

The north is becoming a place from which monsters emerge, rather than retreat into, a vast and deep 'boneyard' of what Robert MacFarlane (2019) terms 'Anthropocene unburials':

> These Anthropocene unburials, as I have come to think of them, are proliferating around the world. Forces, objects and substances thought safely confined to the underworld are declaring themselves above ground with powerful consequences. It is easy to aestheticise such events, curating them into a *Wunderkammer* of weirdness. But they are not curios – they are horror shows. Nor are they portents of what is to come – they are the uncanny signs of a crisis that is already here. (para. 3)

One of these recent unburials is a perfectly preserved one-month old woolly mammoth calf found in the melting permafrost of a Klondike gold mine near Eureka Creek in Canada's Yukon territory on the hereditary lands of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, uncovered in the summer of 2022 when a digger operator shifting muck hit the frozen body. The site and timing of this strike, considered North America's most significant palaeological find, was auspicious – a 'little after noon on June 21, National Indigenous People's Day' – and extremely lucky: 'a miracle of sorts preserved into the present, a scientific gold mine and simply a beautiful thing', in the words of one palaeontologist interviewed by the CBC (Proulx, 2022, para. 3; 'Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in blessing**',** para. 7).

Ice-mummy as oracle, the contents of her young tummy (undigested grasses) reveal the last moments of her life 40,000 years ago before she was fatally trapped in a bog, her accidental exhumation heralded by a powerful storm that blew in when geologists arrived to claim the body. As the palaeontologist reported:

> And the amazing thing is, within an hour of them being there to do the work, the sky opened up, it turned black, lightning started striking and rain started pouring in. (Proulx, 2022, 'She would have been lost in the storm', para. 3)

As though magical forces were at play, this scientist employed familiar Gothic imagery to conjure the drama of the momentous discovery and convey the sublime scale of northern weather.[65] Contemporaneous accounts in other newspapers and journals relate the storm's force with similarly heightened language, describing how the valuable find might easily have been washed away in the deluge to languish in mud for another eternity. The calf was given the tribal name *Nun cho ga*, or Big Baby,[66] and ceremonially blessed by Indigenous elders before being placed in her current tomb, cold storage.

David Jaclin (2018) describes how such fossilised 'gold' is an artifact of the placer mining process, with de-extinction scientists prospecting washed-out Arctic mine sites for 'nuggets of ancient DNA', their Frankensteinian aim to resurrect a chimaera of the extinct

[65] As Barbara Freeman observes, '[i]n Longinus, as well as Kant, the lightning flash is one of the most privileged examples of the sublime' (p. 24).

[66] The calf's size and subsequent containment renders it sublime in the idealised (but ultimately unstable) Kantian formulation: 'Sublime states of mind must be produced by colossal but not monstrous representations of nature' (par. 26, p. 91, cited in Freeman, p. 22).

mammoth (pp. 302–4). Like a modern form of grave-robbing,[67] the activities of these resurrectionists take place in Klondike gold fields, which 'since their discovery in 1897 […] have produced approximately 20 million ounces of gold' (Jaclin, 2018, p. 301). This location, near Dawson City and just 150 miles south of the Arctic Circle, is also the setting for one of 'the most famous poems in Canadian literature, Robert Service's [1907] 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' (Sugars, 2014, p. 1).

Service's large corpus of 'Kiplingesque verse' both exploits and builds upon an extant body of 'mystic-North imagery': as Atwood puts it, Service's poems described 'the uncanny lure of the North and the awful things it could do to you' (1995, p. 17). Service's *oeuvre* of sourdough Gothic balladry arises from his own involvement in the Yukon gold rush, and, though Service was a Scottish immigrant, the American Sam McGee serves as an avatar of the poet's own motives and frigid miseries:

> Why he left his home in the South to roam 'round the Pole, God only knows.
> He was always cold, but the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell;
> Though he'd often say in his homely way that "he'd sooner live in hell."
> (ll. 10–12)

Before Sam succumbs to the 'cursèd cold' he extracts a promise from the poem's unnamed narrator to cremate his remains, for he dreads the fate of being consigned to an 'icy grave.' Burdened with a grinning corpse, the narrator trudges behind the dog sled across the 'homeless snows' in search of combustibles. Finally, as if coming across detritus from the final overland trek of Franklin's men, he happens upon some firewood:

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[67] Surgical training in eighteenth-century Britain required medical students to dissect at least three cadavers and procuring a sufficient supply of recently deceased corpses for the anatomy schools resulted in what Tim Marshall (1995) calls the 'dead body business', an unsavoury but necessary trade reliant upon body-snatching grave-robbers, or 'resurrectionists' (pp. 20–21). As Marshall reads it, the 'fictional doctor' in the 1831 edition of Frankenstein, himself 'dabbl[ing] among the unhallowed damps of the grave' in search of illicit materials, stands for all anatomy professors prior to the 1832 Anatomy Act, which legalised medical dissection of 'unclaimed bodies from the workhouse' and thus 'delivered a reliable supply of corpses to the slab' (1995, p. 7; pp. 22–23). Shelley's novel was also informed by an 1803 experiment with 'galvanic electricity' in which live wires were applied to the body of a recently hanged criminal in an attempt at 'reanimating a corpse' (Marshall, 1995, p. 6) – hence my comparison to the equally audacious aims of de-extinction science, and resurrection via DNA extracted from unburied animal cadavers.

> Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge, and a derelict there lay;
> It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice it was called the 'Alice May.'
> And I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I looked at my frozen chum;
> 'Here,' said I, with a sudden cry, 'is my cre-ma-tor-eum.' (ll. 41–4)

This ruin abandoned in the *unheimlich* snows is haunted by the folly of previous wrecked expeditions and bears traces of Walton's ice-beset ship (and mimics Victor Frankenstein's deathbed request that Walton complete his failed mission to destroy his monstrous creation). Gleefully repurposing what Atwood calls the 'edifice of northern imagery' (1995, p. 116), Service puts a match to the material of maritime Gothic, lighting a Frankensteinian 'funeral pile' to fuel his own narrative's fulcrum as it tilts from horror into parody. A canonic example of Canadian Northern Gothic, 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' also demonstrates what Cynthia Sugars (2012) describes as a 'yearning for settler emplacement and sustainable haunting', in which the ghosts are 'manufactured' and the landscape itself bears witness to 'dreadful events […]: "The Arctic trails have their secret tales / that would make your blood run cold"' (p. 412).

The cartographic conjunction of Big Baby and Sam McGee in the Klondike gold fields – displacement and emplacement, the real and the written, bog and frost, the thawed and the cooked – is the trailhead to a passage through an Arctic maze: a consideration of how the poetic gold field of a sublime Arctic imaginary might become overmined, muddied, or liquified.

Arctic (Ice)

'What do we mean by "the North"?' asks Atwood, and answers:

> Until you get to the North Pole, 'North' being a direction, is relative. 'The North' is thought of as a place, but it's a place with shifting boundaries. It's also a state of mind. (1995, p. 8)

And what do we mean by 'the Arctic'?

According to WorldAtlas.com (2022), the Arctic Circle encompasses everything north of an 'imaginary line' located at 66º, 30'N latitude, and much within this boundary is 'covered with ice' (para. 2). From a vantage point above that line, Nancy Campbell's (2011) poem 'Ulerussivoq / The Debate' redirects the question: 'Where does the Arctic end? Asked

how far south / the region reaches, scholars disagree' (p. 32). These experts variously argue that treeline, temperature, or permafrost marks the ambit, but the speaker questions the utility of such demarcations when the axis of the 'roving' Geographic pole is in constant gravitational flux, and 'drift ice obscures the Arctic's origin' (p. 32).

The imaginary Arctic is also subject to such slippage, but ice is a ubiquitous element in literary constructs of an Arctic sublime. As a polar landscape, the Arctic is distinguished from the Antarctic by its geological composition; put simply, the South Pole is an immense ice-sheet on top of rock, forming a single huge continent, while the North Pole is ice-cap on top of ocean, surrounded by areas of open sea and varied land masses. In regarding the two polar regions as disparate literary settings, Katherine Bowers (2017) nevertheless identifies a fundamental aesthetic commonality between south and north:

> the key scholarly distinction made between the two is that Antarctic Gothic focuses on the antihuman as a source of fear, while Arctic Gothic dwells on the human. Yet [in polar Gothic] texts, ice creates a negative space, which gives rise to supernatural beings that reflect the self. (p. 72)

This 'negative sublime' is the uncharted Gothic water ventured into by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798 with his poem 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere in Seven Parts.' As his Mariner proclaims, 'We were the first that ever burst / Into that silent Sea' (II. ll.101–2). Devoid of anything but mast-high structures of floating ice – and that one unfortunate albatross (the psychic reflection Bowers references) – the towering cryosphere is baldly narrated, as if the volume and scale of it when first encountered overwhelms the Mariner's powers of description: 'the ice was here, the ice was there, / the ice was all around' (I. ll. 57–58).

Fortunately, ice imagery was a portable commodity. Coleridge's 'Rime' was putatively set in a vaguely located southern polar sea, but his 'sources were descriptions of the Arctic rather than the Antarctic' (Lowes, 1927, p. 151, cited in Loomis, 1977, p. 98). Loomis (1977) situates the origins of an Arctic sublime in imagery inherited from accounts of early explorations such as Martin Frobisher's 1557 Arctic expedition, and notes that Coleridge was influenced by Samuel Purchas's 1625 collection of northern travel stories featuring descriptions of marvellous sea ice formations – likened, for instance, to 'white Swannes' (p. 96). Loomis traces a transference of interest from Alpine to Arctic sublime in

travel narratives as taking place in concert with the 'great period of Arctic exploration' that kicked off in the nineteenth century; until 'Rime', he argues, eighteenth-century writers relied on 'lifeless', 'stock' and 'conventional' Arctic tropes that exhibited a 'rather strained sublimity' (pp. 97–98).

About to embark on his journey north, *Frankenstein's* Robert Walton writes to his sister not to worry, for though he is 'going to unexplored regions' he 'shall kill no albatross' (Shelley, 2008, p. 21). Walton's overconfident allusion to the 'Ancient Mariner' is Mary Shelley's 'famous' response to Coleridge's 'negative sublime', a deliberate foil referenced to amplify the 'Romantic hubris' of Walton (Bowers, 2017, p. 13) – and, by extension, to obliquely comment on the entire enterprise of British polar exploration. The reference is also a nod from Shelley that she is sailing in Coleridge's wake, the first Gothic visionary of a 'land of frost and snow.' Her own sources of Arctic imagery came from Coleridge's poem, 'a library book about Siberia' and her lover Percy Shelley's own 'paeans to the Alps' (Spufford, 1996, p. 60).

In considering actual Arctic landscapes encountered first-hand, Hastrup (2013) emphasises the primacy of ice in an enduring Arctic poetics that evokes both beauty and terror to depict 'the timeless and sublime character of the ice-clad world' (p. 52):

> Emplacement within the Arctic topography is literally towered over by geographical structures of such magnitude that there can be no escaping from them, only a sensation of temporary emergence from topography […]. Poets recognise this. (p. 56)

In a geopolitical sense, Arctic emplacement comprises the northern parts of Canada, Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden that encroach within the Arctic circle, and the entireties of Alaska, Greenland and Iceland (Kelman, 2017, p. 1). Unlike Antarctica, which is host to only temporary residents, there are permanent settler and indigenous populations in the Arctic, and its human inhabitation predates British and Canadian exploration and extraction expeditions. Apposite sources of literary 'fear' similar (but not identical) to those identified by Bowers in regard to south and north polar Gothic ('antihuman' and 'human') are coeval in early Canadian Northern Gothic – Cynthia Sugars observes that one strand portrays the Arctic wilderness as 'inhabited by savage creatures (animal and human)'; the other expresses it as

terra nullius or 'devoid of ghosts', hence, as Sugars has argued, the literary impetus for an emplacement of invented spectres (2012, p. 410).[68]

Footsteps (Ice)

Frankenstein's Robert Walton subscribes to the *terra nullius* or *tabula rasa* vision of the north, and assumes that the Arctic's 'icy climes' – a 'region of beauty and delight' – will be unpopulated; before setting sail from Russia, he voices his own desire for polar emplacement:

> I shall satiate any ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. (Shelley, 2008, p. 16)

Such ardent curiosity fuelled the commodification of sublime imagery for a nineteenth-century reading public, who, like Walton, entertained a number of speculations about the polar north – as Loomis (1977) puts it, 'What was there? an open polar sea beyond a rim of ice? a continent supporting an unknown civilization? a huge hole with a maelstrom whirling into it?' (p. 100).

It was a bay of berg-laden water and looming cliffs christened without irony *Meta Incognito.*[69] A blank white slate where one could scratch 'I was here.' And it was a Gothic heterotopia – a 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space' (Foucault 1986, p. 24) – somewhere up above the imaginary line. A fascination with the uncanny North and the stuff it is composed of informed the early nineteenth-century zeitgeist, as Catherine Lanone (2010) explains:

> at a time when England was heading for the soot and smoke of the Industrial Revolution, transparent, pristine ice became a source of fascination, an obsession prompted both by science and aesthetics. From crystals to glaciers to the blank maps of the poles, the mystery of metamorphic ice beckoned, a

[68] As Adriana Craciun (2016) notes, in Britain similar '[…] contradictions and ideologically corrupt visions of an empty and uninhabited Victorian Arctic are […] well established' (p. 9).

[69] Queen Elizabeth's 'unromantic' Elizabethan-age designation for the area around Frobisher Bay, itself named after Martin Frobisher's 1557 expedition, represents its commercial value rather than its stunning physical landscape of 'thousand-foot cliffs' and a 'dazzling glacier' set against dark mountains (Loomis, 1977, p. 97).

> transparent oxymoron, neither liquid nor solid, an enticing alchemy casting its spell, the enigma of purity and creation. (p. 202)

The enigma of ice remains, even as its mysteries are now being decoded as data—polar ice is oracular, as Jean McNeil puts it, and a preserver of 'the atmospheric past through the chemical residues it traps' (2011, p. 4).

McNeil shares in Walton's ardent curiosity, acknowledging that polar travellers enact 'a pre-scripted story, of exploration and quest. In part it's an old instinct to venture over the edge of the known world' (2011, p. 5). In recent years, Arctic and Antarctic fellowships and residencies have enabled writers and artists to travel to these polar icescapes and experience emplacement amid the metaphoric icescapes;[70] McNeil's 2011 book *Night Orders: Poems from Antarctica and the Arctic* is a result of such opportunities. *Night Orders* documents her maritime experience of the polar regions, with a 2006 shipboard voyage to Antarctica and an Arctic sailing to the west coast of Greenland in 2009, and is not, as she alerts us, a 'conventional poetry collection', but a chronological account rendered in sketches, diary entries and poem sequences, with paratexts taken from ship-log and marine lingo (pp. 2–7).

In the Antarctic McNeil discovers a 1950's *Glossary of Ice Terms* in the base camp library, and like Coleridge's sources of imagery for his South Pole sublime, it is largely comprised of loan-words from Arctic languages, nouns such as the Greenlandic *nunatuk* or the Russian *stambuka* or *sastrugi* to describe particular ice structures (pp. 4–6). McNeil's collection includes a series of prose poems inspired by this linguistic ice-ography, data collected from both up-close observation and scientific vocabulary affirming her thesis that 'the discovery of a new crop of words can provoke and inform a completely new artistic work' (p. 5).

From a section interspersed with found texts from a volume of British Admiralty sailing directions, this excerpt from McNeil's prose poem 'Isfjord' identifies a poetic and human impulse to rely on figurative language to capture such phenomena:

[70] A.B. Jackson notes a correlation between such creative residencies and the renewed 'surge of interest in polar history within the mass-market publishing industry' that commenced in the late twentieth century (2015, pp. 6–7).

> There is no way out of the fjord; its mouth is blocked by a tongue of ice. The ice lean and monumental the mind can only understand it through comparison: cathedrals, tors, airliners. Mid-August and the sun only black whalehunter hours in the town warming to its own demise. The sea ice is gone. (p. 74,)

The town 'warming to its own demise' is both seaport and the floating sun-whittled city of ice, structures both real and verbal melting as the metaphor ice must also warm to its own demise. Ice is 'technically […] immortal'; enjoying a sort of afterlife as it is 'transformed, through melt, into water, into vapour' (p. 4). Francis Spufford (2004) identifies a similar metamorphic property in ice composed of imagery:

> People have seen cities in ice for centuries. The curious thing is that the style of the architecture changes faithfully with changing tastes. Towers and spires were perennial, while seventeenth-century sailors in the Arctic started glimpsing Baroque fretwork, and Victorians added in Egyptian obelisks and Stone Age dolmens. Captain Scott's men saw a complete model of St Paul's Cathedral float by in the Antarctic – just like a 'visit London' poster on the Edwardian tube. (p. 281)

Robin Robertson's (2010) poem 'Signs on a White Field' is a virtuoso catalogue of visual and sonic ice-imagery deploying such similes updated for the twenty-first century. On first reading this free verse lyric seems more post-romantic perambulation than Arctic ecoGothic, as the speaker circumnavigates a frozen lake in an unspecified Arctic icescape, a flaneur of the frosts, exercising his onomatopoeic muscle as if tracking Stephen Dedalus' stride in *Ulysses* (from which Robertson's poem quite possibly takes its title).[71] Here, the speaker likens huge blocks of ice heaved up by the liquid entity below to 'luggage on a carousel' – suggesting a terminus, perhaps, a point of arrival at his own personal epiphany, or a transition point (p. 4).

The poem opens on an image of solar heat – 'the burnt horizon' – and the sun's climacteric is the force triggering contraction in the lake's 'hidden tons of water', its 'groans and rumbles / like someone shifting heavy tables far below' (p. 4). The ensuing auditory imagery gives the poem its tension and drama, and an unnerving subterranean subtext, that the furniture of our earthly abode is moving beneath us. The speaker 'hears the lake all night as a distant war', and its 'boom' and 'detonating crack' recalls the 'fearful' sea ice in

[71] For a sidebar discussion of onomatopoeia and intertextuality in *Ulysses*, see Murray McArthur's article, '"Signs on a White Field": Semiotics and Forgery in the "Proteus" Chapter of Ulysses', *ELH*, 53(3), pp. 633–52.

Coleridge's 'Rime', which was not 'silent' in perpetuity but 'cracke'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd – / like noises of a swound' (I. ll. 59–60). In the morning Robertson's speaker walks onto the ice 'among sun-cups, / snow penitents', to clear a 'porthole in the crust' and gaze down (p. 5): he is not alone in this wilderness, for a presence observes him from below a pane of ice – *sila,* as Kirsten Hastrup might call it, or the vengeful 'Polar Spirit' Katherine Bowers identifies in Coleridge's 'Rime' (p. 73), perhaps; or simply his own psyche reflected, narcissus-like, another sort of penitent.

Robertson uses terminology with ready-made figurative resonance: snow penitents are peaked formations created by melt, clusters of stalagmites that resemble white-hooded Spanish monks.[72] The effect of weather on snow is described by Nancy Campbell, a contemporary poet and non-fiction writer who spent time in Arctic residencies. During her own seven-year sojourn in the north, she learns that Antarctic explorers' footsteps had a lingering effect:

> the snow that they stepped on, compressed by the weight of the body, would remain fixed in place as the lighter, unmarked snow around them blew away. These pillars of ice were visible from far away long after the explorer had passed on. (2018, p. 153)

Here, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's footsteps stand proud of Robertson's poem, a scaffolding at first concealed under 'White Field's' fresh fall of updated imagery. The penance-driven trajectory of the Mariner's narrative – 'the man hath penance done / and penance more will do' (V. ll. 413–14) – charts a path for Robertson's speaker; the Mariner like someone 'seven days drown'd' (VII. l. 585) receives a spiritual resuscitation, while Robertson's 'drowned man' is 'waked' or woken to an unstated revelation (p. 5). Following Coleridge's use of auditory and visual imagery to conjure – as 'Rime' did – what Bowers calls 'the alien quality of polar space' (p. 74), Robertson amplifies sound effects and stacks on the ice slabs to create the overwhelming sensory experience of an uncanny landscape, and there are subtle markers of allusion along the way: in 'Rime' the Ocean's 'great bright eye most silently / Up to the moon is cast' (VI. l. 422) and in 'White Field' the lake's 'living green' regards the speaker

[72] *National Geographic* (2013) offers this evocative description: '*Nieve penitente*, or penitent snow, are collections of spires that resemble robed monks – or penitents. They are flattened columns of snow wider at the base than at the tip and can range in height from 3 to 20 feet (1 to 6 meters).'

(p. 5); where the Mariner hears the ‘sweet jargoning’ of ‘all little birds’ (V. ll. 350–51), Robertson’s speaker listens to a ‘racket of jackdaws, the serrated call / of a falcon’ (p. 4).

And should we doubt we are on a ship, albeit an allegorical one, ‘White Field’ features ‘a deck’ and that ‘porthole’ in the snow crust – along with a jump scare in ‘the detonating crack’ of ‘a dropped plank’ (pp. 4–5).

Cairns

The changeable nature of the Arctic Sea posed immense challenges for explorers trying to chart or follow unfixable cartographies due to the mutable nature of the ice itself; as Catherine Lanone (2010) notes, ‘a passage which is open will be closed the next moment, it cannot be charted or explored like land’ (p. 208). The Arctic maze as a sublime Gothic space exhibits a characteristic common to all heterotopias, ‘a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them permeable’ (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). Foucault offers examples related to social, religious, or civic spaces, but the principle may be extended to the geography of the high Arctic, especially regarding the heterotopic element of ‘curious exclusions’; consider how the icescape, long inhabited by indigenous people, so persistently resisted the British Admiralty’s quest to find a Northwest Passage connecting the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. In 1818 (the year of *Frankenstein’s* first publication) the Scottish officer John Ross commanded the first of the Admiralty’s explorations to locate this then-mythical route, somewhere in the archipelago above North America’s northern coastline. Sailing into Lancaster Sound, Ross approached what would eventually prove to be the eastern gate to the Passage; however, he was ‘deceived by refraction, [thinking] he saw a mountain range closing the horizon’, and sailed back to England (Lanone, 2010, p. 203).

Was this a *Fata Morgana* conjured by *sila* to keep Ross out, an act of sorcery by sea and ice? This superior mirage lives on in the name Ross assigned it on his maps, the Croker Mountain Range. Hastrup (2013) writes that Ross was similarly rebuffed when attempting ingress to Davis Strait, but in this instance ‘it was simply packed ice that blocked his passage; it argued against his progress, which was then dropped’ (p. 53).

John Ross eventually returned to the Arctic, and after he successfully reached the Magnetic Pole in 1831, the ice again conspired against him – this time denying him exit –

and his ship was hopelessly frozen stuck. The ensuing desperate search for rescue may have inspired the handwritten poem Ross buried under a cairn on Leopold Island in the winter of 1832 (Behrisch, 2003, p. 73). Cairns in the Scottish Highlands served as 'grave markers, wayfinding marks, or both' – and in the Arctic the British expeditions used them as such, but also as 'nodes in a postal system' (Craciun, 2016, pp. 73–75). Ross's poem was never discovered, but fortunately he mailed a copy to Sir John Barrow twenty years later, and 'Far as the eye can reach' is now preserved in the British Library. Ross's reason for secretly burying the poem is 'not surprising', Erica Behrisch (2003) suggests, '[g]iven the clear discursive break' with the 'straightforward and objective rhetoric' of his 'official' expedition papers (p. 84). The Admiralty expected 'neutrality' in the scientific record and 'the explorer existed only as a data recorder':

> In order to record, they had to survive. Perhaps because this personal engagement with the Arctic landscape had no place in Admiralty reports, it became a central theme of the poetry written by nineteenth-century Arctic explorers. Scientific exploration and artistic production combined on expeditions to show two sides of Arctic adventure: the objective and the subjective, the official and the personal. (pp. 76–77)

Behrisch's astute reading of Ross's poem demonstrates how it resists the authoritative 'language of science' by using 'intentionally vague' description and acknowledging the poet's 'inability to understand the inner workings of the Arctic world' (p. 82).

Instead, 'Far as the eye can reach' records a negative sublime and the emotions of desolation, sorrow, and exhaustion it inspires in a crew confronted with 'one vast Icy Solitude profound' (l. 2). The immense landscape – 'desolate and bare' of vegetation and unrelieved by any 'soothing vapours' (ll. 4–6) – and the bleakness it inspires is compressed, like a tightly packed snowball, into a single compact stanza; the ten-line poem is composed of five rhymed couplets, and is a variation on the *dizain*, a sixteenth-century French form. The *dizain* – 'French for a "collection of ten"' – is a fixed form with lines of eight to ten syllables each and a set rhyme pattern of 'ababbccdcd' (Myers, J. and Simms, M., 1989, p. 87). Ross adheres to a decasyllabic line, but constricts his rhyme scheme to aabbccddee, and these controlled and decorous couplets function as anti-ode, or anti-pastoral. The first six lines are an impressionistic rendering of the utter solitude and profound silence surrounding the men, in which the voice – no speaking 'I' to set it apart – both observes and experiences this frigid stasis with them. There is a volta or sonnet-like turn in the last four lines,

a despairing apostrophic exclamation that reaches to comprehend or explain how ‘these Regions’ ‘had all at once stood still’ (ll. 7–10).

Here, the white field is icepack, and the men are beset by ‘a field of lifeless sorrow’ underpinned by a frozen sea; the ‘proud waves’ are a symbol of the same fatal romantic hubris that Mary Shelley critiqued, as the ocean’s own agency is forcefully stilled by a supernatural power and the wind’s ‘fatal blow’ (ll. 7–10). That the crew must seek rest on this morgue-like, inhospitable surface hints at the horrors of polar subsistence – as glossed by Behrisch:

> Their placement on ‘the snowclad ground’ keeps the crew physically separated from the natural world – they lie atop it, separated from the earth by a layer of snow – but the ‘silent stillness’ of their collective sleep makes their relationship to the landscape much more ambiguous. (p. 81)

The Arctic-as-mortuary implication is rendered more poignant in a biographical reading of the poem. Three crew members died on this expedition, during which Ross and his men were blocked from entering the Barrow Strait by ‘one vast solid and unbroken mass of ice’; at the same time they were trapped by the ‘wretched prison’ of ice, and denied both entrance and exit waited four weeks in a makeshift shelter called *Somerset House* – ‘literally the inhabitants of an Iceberg!’ – before finding an escape lane and sailing home in defeat (Ross, cited in Holland and Savelle, 1987, pp. 73, 75–76). Although Ross interacted with Inuit people, in ‘Far as the eye can reach’ the depicted resistance of the landscape to human and other life forms works to reinforce the notion that the Arctic is an empty, uninhabited zone.

Nancy Campell’s 2014 poem ‘Kinguleruttui / The Survivors’ evokes the same impermeable Arctic surface, voiced from the point of view of early Greenlandic settlers. Like Ross, Campbell uses form, but here it is pantoum-as-reportage, a refrain of horrors on repeat as the chorus unsparingly supplies the reader with grisly testimony of what it was to live (and die) in the Arctic:

> there was no earth to hold them. Where could we hide the dead
> when our sons were buried alive on the barren rock?
> They were left to die, smothered in stones to keep them still;
> the winter was their warder. Snow blew over the bones […]. (p. 11)

The alliterative verse approximates an apt poetic inheritance for these migrants, tenth century Icelanders, and Campbell's poem is saturated in the gore and ruthlessness of wars between kin often recounted in saga and edda. In five stanzas, 'The Survivors' is the capsule narrative of ill-fated venture, a good luck tale that ends in madness and horror. The settlers scarcely believe their fortune at finding a 'safe' island to settle on, but things soon turn: 'driven by the darkness / men kill their kin' and there's 'no earth to hold' the rotting corpses, requiring burial under 'rocks to hinder beasts'; nor is there 'earth to cultivate' and the firstborn baby is 'buried alive on the highest rock', a sacrificial infanticide whose cries haunt the community in the sound made by the wind (p. 11). The repetition of auditory and kinetic imagery carried forward as phrases in the pantoum is an effective use of form, each stanza haunted by its predecessor. Winter functions as a 'warder' or jailor to the bones of the dead and to the people 'crying to be free': 'The ice on those cairns was as good as a key in a lock' (p. 11).

Again, that inhospitable earth. In Ross, the explorers have 'entered' the Arctic Archipelago but are excluded from its innermost regions, and the ice is a barrier beneath and around them. In Campbell, the settlers 'land' on the frozen rocky ground of Greenland, but it rejects both their attempts to cultivate it and the bodies of their dead. In these two poems, the impermeability of the Arctic land and sea surfaces reifies the illusory nature of heterotopic sites that enforce exclusions, in which 'we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded' (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). In the 'real' and reimagined historical past, emplacement was a chilly business.

(Im)Permafrost

Let us circle back to Robin Robertson's poem, its final lines an epigraph piled like a cairn at the head of this essay. If ice in 'The Survivors' is a warder's key, frozen in a rocky lock, in 'Signs on a White Field' heat is the portal to the Arctic icescape – 'The sun's hinge on the burnt horizon / has woken the sealed lake' (p. 4). A seal has been broken on an icy subterranean imprisonment, and some *thing* released in sonic form:

> a huge release of sound, a boom
> that rolls under the ice for miles,
> some fluked leviathan let loose
> from centuries of sleep. (p. 5)

The poem opens with this waking, and closes (open-endedly) with another, as the 'drowned' speaker is 'waked' in the 'weathering ground' (p. 5). To be waked is to be awoken, revivified – *woke* – but to be waked is also to be 'mourned.' There is no random act of albatross cruelty to flag 'White Field' as ecoGothic in intent, but in its contemporary context, a world of rising sea levels and mega-floods, the meaning of the speaker's drowned state opens a door to such interpretation. Weathering ground is a symbolic field here, and 'weathering' is also a scientific term referring to breakdown in the mineral composition of soil and rock.[73] A passive or static process for the earth, but 'weathering' also implies something agentic, that the drowned man is being weathered by the world.

Canadian poet Larissa Andrusyshyn's 2010 poetry collection *Mammoth* features another species of leviathan, released from the unsealed ground of Siberia's melting permafrost. The unearthing of the titular 'Mammoth' predates the recent discovery of the Yukon's Big Baby, and the unnamed ice-mummy in Andrusyshyn's book is based on an ice-age cadaver pulled from an ancient Siberian peat bog. Along with the release of 'carbon dioxide' and 'anthrax' and other disturbing unburials, this mammoth relic represents just a small portion of what Heather Altfeld (2019) terms 'the sheer volume of animalia surfacing as the permafrost melts' (p. 229). In Part I of Andrusyshyn's poem 'Extinctions', the mammoth is found 'frozen solid in Siberian permafrost' by a 'nine-year old nomadic reindeer herder / named Jarkov':

> After twenty thousand years
> of stasis, from one ice-age
> to another, they heave it out like a chunk of sidewalk.
> The mammoth is airlifted
> by helicopter, the block with tusks
> dangles below like a locket. (p. 10)

The workman-like concrete imagery of the carcass being extracted from the Arctic permafrost like a 'chunk of sidewalk' is reminiscent of the poetic impulse to see human-built structures in ice identified by Francis Spufford. Here, the image-field is mud, once frozen ground dismantled by man and melt both. That chunk of concrete is also Atwood's edifice of icy northern imagery being taken apart, like a movie set on a sound stage. The simile

[73] Zolkos, Tank, & Kokelj (2018) argue that the 'thaw-driven ground collapse (thermokarst)' of Arctic permafrost is hastening carbon-related weathering processes and consequently producing 'significant, previously undocumented CO2' (abstract, n.p.).

comparing the transported mammoth body to a locket is an apt, evocative visual—one can imagine the chains suspending a lump of jewellery mid-air—yet is subtly suggestive of *memento mori*, and how lockets function as repositories for photos of dead relatives (a sepia-toned image of the ancestral Arctic, perhaps, or a hint of the personal loss threaded through the poem sequence).

Elsewhere, a detached tone and clinical diction sparing of figurative adornment is suited to the speculative conceit running through the collection, that the mammoth is both genome-yielding specimen and reanimating scientist. As Kerry Clare (2010) observes, this 'is poetry unleashing the magic implicit in algebra, taxonomy, molecular biology, zoology' (para. 1). An unacknowledged figure shadows what Andrew DuBois (2012) terms 'autopsy logic' (p. 617), as if Frankenstein has been taken out of the deep-freeze and thawed and is now working with constituent biological elements of 'adenine, guanine, cytosine, thymine' rather than an assemblage of stitched-together grave meats. The mammoth's task is to clone the endling Ivan Andrusyshyn, the poet's late father, and 'the only known specimen' of his kind, whose ghostly image haunts the poems ('The Mammoth Sequences the Ivan Andrusyshyn Gene', p. 59).[74] 'We are very close' [to achieving this resurrection], states the mammoth, the subtext of relationship overlaid on its promised feat—the contiguity of poet and mammoth, scientist and creature, death and resurrection (p. 59).

This conflation evokes Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's (1996b) thesis, that 'the monster is the harbinger of category crisis' and a 'rebuke to boundary and enclosure' (pp. 6–7):

> the *monstrum* is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,' a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again. (p. 4)

Robertson's figurative 'leviathan' and Andrusyshyn's sci-fi 'mammoth' signify by rupturing the icy façade of the Arctic sublime; they are what Robert MacFarlane (2019) would call

[74] In 'Leaving Ukraine, 1929' we learn that Ivan Andrusyshyn's mother immigrated to Canada to escape famine in Ukraine (p. 60).

‘unruly, obscene surfacings’ that confound the boundaries demarcating an underland (para. 7).

Andrusyshyn’s technique is genre-blurring and *Mammoth* might be labelled sci-fi or slipstream were it prose fiction. Permafrost does something similar, embodying a sort of geological category crisis: ‘that peculiar combination of water pretending to be land within the land itself’ (Wiebe, 2003, p. 106, cited in Lanone, 2010, p. 208). True Siberian permafrost is ‘perennially cryotic ground’ that has been ‘frozen for at least two years’ – a ‘mortal substratum of ice’ (Altfeld, 2019, pp. 218–19). Now these mortal and weathering ‘mud-glaciers’ – to borrow Andrusyshyn’s term – are spawning ice-age corpses as often as melting bergs calve ice, both with accelerating frequency. The Siberian permafrost, suggests Altfeld, is ‘one of the last frontiers’: ‘a silo of sorts, a granary of diamonds and ore and oil and bone’ (2019, pp. 218–19). The Yukon’s mudscape similarly ‘encases sought-after ore and fossils’, Jaclin (2018) writes:

> More than just a commodity-extraction medium, mud encapsulates dreams: dreams of gold, dreams of knowledge contained within tons of decaying organic material, and dreams for bones full of potency that avantgarde microbiology labs can use to resurrect animal lives and pierce a little further into the secrets of life. (p. 305)

An icy Arctic sublime is no longer a language suited to these final frontiers of exploration and extraction. To reprise Hastrup’s observation, it is the ice that holds together a timeless leitmotif of Arctic poetry. ‘What do we stand to lose, in a world without ice?’ asks McNeil: ‘For one, there is a lexicon at stake’ (2011, p. 5). A sublime lexicon is a fluid one, subject to revision, and to follow the Romantic engagement with a sublimity capturing elevated ‘transactions between nature and the human soul’, Francis Spufford (1996) lists (with a raised eyebrow) an ensuing ‘wealth of different sublimes’:

> [a natural,] a negative, a positive, a mathematical, an ethical, a psychological, a religious, an egotistical, a rhetorical, an aesthetic, and a dynamic sublime […] all of which agreed […] in putting forward for consideration something distinctly pleasurable, but definitely un-beautiful. (p. 19)

Spufford spots an ‘unbeautiful’ element in Edmund Burke’s nascent thinking around his theory of the Sublime. In 1746 Dublin, the river Liffey ‘was in spate, loaded with the mud of the counties upstream’, and this brown flood provoked in young Burke the germinal idea; as

he wrote to his friend Shackleton, ‘It gives me pleasure to see nature in these great though terrible scenes’ (Spufford, 1996, pp. 16–17).

Steve Mentz (2013), in proposing a ‘Brown’ ecology that ventures into muddier places than the green or blue humanities might, suggests that with its blending of ‘liquid and solid’, ‘[t]hinking brown pushes us into hybrid spaces that span living and nonliving matter, aesthetic values and biological drives’ (pp. 193–94). His attendant reading of John Bunyan’s ‘Slough of Despond’, a literary ur-swamp, cites a character’s explication of the allegorical mudscape: ‘This Miry slow, is such a place as cannot be mended’ (p. 200). Nor can the Siberian permafrost’s ‘magical substratum’ – which ‘in places is up to seven hundred to eight hundred meters thick; […] undisturbed, for millions of years’ – nor can this ground be mended: ‘[o]nce melted’, warns Altfeld , ‘this ice cannot be recreated. Ever’ (2019, p. 233).

In the terrible scenes to come, the Arctic sublime’s silent snows, vast solitudes, and argots of ice will give way to a glossary of mud and flood, a semiotics of sludge. A brown and muddy Gothic sub/slime.

Conclusion: The New World

> She woke and spread the map out on the floor. What
> was she looking for? Her skin was her own small ghost [.]
>
> 'The Map-Woman', Carol Ann Duffy (2002)

What was *I* looking for?

In Carol Ann Duffy's (2002) poem 'The Map-Woman', identity is an embodiment of lost places, where displacement is marked by unfamiliar new street names and wrong turns. Despite shedding her skin-map, the speaker cannot entirely lose her old self, where 'Deep in the bone / old streets tunnelled and burrowed, hunting for home' (p. 7). Duffy's life has been full of what Stan Smith (2008) calls 'casual displacements'; Smith notes that while such economic migrations dictated by opportunity are unexceptional within the general patterns of British postwar mobility, Duffy has created a 'mythos of displacement' in her poetics (p. 101). Duffy moved from Glasgow to England at age four, where the idiomatic Irish spoken by her mother and the Glaswegian of her father would have created, in the new place, what Smith calls a 'linguistic dislocation' (Smith, 2008, p. 102).

I was born in Canada, shortly after my parents emigrated from Scotland, and, as with Duffy, my primary linguistic dislocation would have been in the difference between my parents' modes of speaking – my mother's Shetlandic dialect and my father's Glasgow vernacular. I was certainly not the only first-generation Canadian in my first-grade classroom who sounded different, but I made a conscious effort to lose my Scottish accent and sound 'Canadian' – a secondary linguistic dislocation like Duffy's, in which my parents' way of speaking had now become 'alien', to use Smith's term. But I have no similar 'mythos of displacement' in my own poetry. When I started writing poems, I found myself wanting but hesitating to include words like 'smirr', as Kathleen Jamie does in 'The Wishing Tree' (2004). Or 'dreich' or 'girn' or 'moorit' or 'sleekit' or 'holm'. The 'dislocuted […] self no longer remembers what […] language it is homesick for', as Smith says (p. 102). Unlike the map-woman, I wasn't displaced from a country, but a poetics.

I had written an adaptation of Matthew Lewis's seminal horror novel *The Monk* for my master's thesis, and liked it. When considering how to approach writing *Immigrants/Effects*, a poetry collection inspired by the objects or 'effects' in the trunk my parents brought with them from Scotland, I felt that I had found a fitting genre, or mode, in the Gothic. At the center of this collection would be a long piece based on my paternal grandfather's impoverished postwar Glasgow life, his seeking work abroad, and, following his unwelcome return to his estranged family in 1957, his suicide on the railroad tracks.

After arriving in Sheffield to start my PhD research, I started experimenting with making poems that felt Gothic – in a general, undefined, dark sort of way – as if by squashing ominous imagery and rhyme into tight stanzas, form alone might conjure some vital Gothic spirit. For the supporting critical research, I started at what seemed like the beginning, reading the great Gothic poetry of the eighteenth century – Sir Walter Scott's 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel', Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Christabel' and 'Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,' Anne Bannerman's *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry*. I was charmed by the supernatural, framed narrative in Scott (an elvish Dwarf casting a glamour to disguise himself as a dog! an impossibly preserved Wizard's corpse still clasping a Mighty spell book!); the suggestive and sinister atmosphere of the unfinished poem 'Christabel'; and the disturbingly effective vocal lacuna of Bannerman's Banquo-like figure 'The Dark Ladie', whose deep-toned curse makes the dinner guests faint. I also sought out poetry by contemporary practitioners of ecoGothic, the grotesque, and other notionally Gothic modes: new and hybrid forms beyond the eighteenth-century ballad imitations, such as Rebecca Tamás' *Witch*, and MacGillivray's *The Last Wolf of Scotland, The Nine of Diamonds,* and *The Gaelic Garden of the Dead*. Robin Robertson's *Grimoire: New Scottish Folktales*, refashioned folk stories saturated with spells, curses, and grisly murders, and told with old Scottish words like 'mimmerkin', 'hirpling' and 'thrawn', came closest to what I was attempting, but failing, to write.

Although these books were 'Gothic', they didn't have the 'displacement' factor I had proposed. In other words, I wasn't sure *what* I was looking for, but hoped I would know if I found it. My parameters were nationalistic and linguistic: Scottish and Canadian poets only, and of the latter, Scottish-Canadian poets preferably. Helen Adam was almost disqualified for going to America. That would have been a mistake. I had started gathering family documents about my grandfather and planning a trip to Glasgow to visit sites that might bear traces of him and my father's family, field research to supplement the poem I had started writing about

the events, and effects, of his suicide. But the map is not the territory. Before I could conduct my field research, the pandemic struck, and lockdown commenced. Instead of tramping the borders of the Glasgow necropolis looking for a pauper's grave, I ended up online, digging through Siberian necrofields for the defrosted corpses of prehistoric ice-mummies. And, like the elfin knight 'Tam Lin', I unwittingly found myself in fairyland, reading old Scottish folk ballads collected by Francis James Child.

***

'I found myself in fairyland'.

This statement calls to mind one of my research questions, 'Who am I *here*?' My reading of Stephen Scobie's 1987 *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* provides a partial answer – in Isabel's case, in the heterotopic Fairyland of Canada, she is a man named John Fubbister. When she steps back over the threshold into the mortal world, she is again a woman, the subject of abjection and derision, demoted in her labour, status and pay. Scobie's long poem illuminates a pattern of economic migration in eighteenth-century Scotland, with its historical narrative of an Orcadian who crosses the Atlantic to work for the Hudson's Bay Company only to return emptied, a 'Nor-waster'.

My identification of the 'Daemon Lover' ballad underpinning *Ballad* was serendipitous, as many of my discoveries during this research have been. I knew of the historical Gunn through my previous research on *The Monk* regarding the character Matilda, who also cross-dressed to gain entry to a male space. I submitted an abstract on *Ballad* as a 'wilderness Gothic' to a call for papers for the *Reimagining the Gothic: Bodies and Gender* conference to be held at the University of Sheffield; due to the pandemic, the event was cancelled, but my initial 'wilderness Gothic' analysis evolved into 'heterotopic fairyland', spurred on when I presented the revised paper at The University of Hertfordshire's *Gothic Encounters with Enchantment and The Faerie Realm in Literature and Culture* online conference. The paper was published and became the first chapter written for the thesis.[75]

[75] The work on *Ballad* appears in Chapter 2 of the thesis, which is organised chronologically and thematically and not by date of composition.

Another of my objectives was to discover the oral traditions and literary heritage that might inform contemporary Gothic poetry. I didn't anticipate how far back that would take me. My research on Scobie's *Ballad* took me back in time to the old Scottish supernatural ballads, making it possible for me to detect these influences in the rhymed, Scots-inflected ballads of twentieth-century Scottish-American poet Helen Adam. I admit that I almost overlooked the fact that her 'Naked in the Ditches' is a feminist revision of 'Tam Lin' (although it now seems blindingly obvious); in fact, my initial response after a cursory reading of Adam's work was that it was clever but dated, and ephemeral rather than deep. My first impression was incorrect. I hope that my readings will complement and add to the work done by Kristin Prevallet, Cindy McMann and others on Adam's timeless, deviously constructed, and socially aware Gothic balladry. The chapter on Adam supplies another response to the question, 'Who am I *here*?', by situating Adam as a Scottish poet displaced by war and circumstance who finds her poetic voice in a new cultural milieu.

***

That statement, 'I found myself in fairyland', also summons to mind Foucault's proposition that the mirror functions as a placeless utopia, where the self is 'reconstituted':

> from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. (1986, p. 24)

Foucault's concept of the heterotopia was invaluable to my reading of the 'Arctic Hell' in *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* – the space where Isabel reconstitutes or transforms herself – as a site of simultaneity, both Canadian wilderness and fairy realm. Foucault's heterotopology also proved useful in my readings of Arctic Gothic poetry, especially in my thinking of the Canadian Arctic as a space resistant to emplacement, i.e. rebuffing British sea expeditions seeking a Northwest Passage. My research on the Arctic literary sublime resulted in my conclusion that climate change will necessitate new aesthetic categories of the sublime.

This work on the Arctic sublime was developed as a paper for *Gothic Natures Journal*, research undertaken in tandem with my poetry sequence about Pleistocene animal cadavers displaced from underground by melting permafrost. The Siberia depicted in *Effects: Poems* is both a literary heterotopia and an actual geographic place. Rather than writing a

planned sequence of poems about the material belongings in my parents' *kist* – knitting belt, *skean dhu*, bagpipes – I curated a *Wunderkammer* of Gothic effigies in my poems about exhumed ice-age animal bodies. Some of these 'exhibits' have been published, and shared at conferences, and it was my accidental discovery of the defrosted, decapitated wolf head that sent my research in the direction of the Arctic.

The primary aim of this thesis was to identify a Gothic poetics of displacement to develop new forms of this in my own poetry. The true, lost voice I was looking for remains as tantalisingly enigmatic as the Dark Ladie's veiled, unknowable utterance. Bannerman's 'Ladie' is doubly displaced, abducted by Sir Guyon from her foreign home and 'dislocuted'. This cryptic figure can be read as a channel for Bannerman herself. My own proxy is the scientist figure who accompanies the mammoth-tusk hunters on digs and the journey upriver. He is a passive conduit of events, a witness carried along on the current toward the inevitable catastrophe, equipped with internal dialogue but assigned no speech – as dumbstruck, perhaps, by what he sees, as Sir Guyon's dinner guests.

Albeit not of the gruesome, lore- and magic-drenched type of Gothic I had hoped to write – although there are gestures toward that in the manuscript – *Effects* represents a new Gothic, nonetheless:

> For ecoGothic, the past that returns is not a buried family secret, but a repressed evolutionary truth; the space that imprisons is not a human-built structure but the broader nonhuman world, including its predators, terrain, and climate. (Poland and Parker, 2019, p. 12)

David Punter observes that 'the German word *Heimlich* […] ends up encompassing its opposite, the "unhomely," "the unfamiliar"' (2012, p. 253); at the outset of this thesis, my proposition followed upon Punter's notion, that dislocation is essentially uncanny, or *unheimlich*. This thesis situates such a poetics of displacement – the poetry discussed in Part 1, and my own poetics of 'dislocution' – within a Gothic mode.

***

My original intent, to heed the Gothic call to memorialise and remember, as Cynthia Sugars puts it (2014, p. 1), has not been abandoned. Stephen Scobie's documentary Gothic

poem provides a method for the long poem I still plan to write about my grandfather, an amalgam of proto-Gothic Scots ballad template, documentary history, and a first-person speaker who narrates his own downfall. My approach will bear in mind Francis B. Gummere's thesis that '[t]he worst stories […] come directly from life, and ballad or tale simply follows fact' (1907, cited in Wimberley 1965, p. 8). Another model for this poem will be Robin Robertson's 2018 free verse novelistic poem, *The Long Take*. Through the perspective of its protagonist, the poem follows his migration from Nova Scotia, to New York, to Hollywood, and finally to San Francisco. The poem engages an experimental, filmic approach, fitting to its era and Hollywood setting (depicted in fairy-tale imagery), but it is also Gothic. This war veteran 'Walker', from Nova Scotia (or New Scotland), is doubly displaced – from an ancestral homeland, Scotland, and Canada. Robertson's creation, a figure representative of a larger displacement of soldiers after the war, is another model for the story of my Scottish grandfather, a similarly disenfranchised Gothic Wanderer.

As noted in the Introduction to the thesis, Gothic literature reflects a 'displaced' engagement with political and social problems (Punter, 1996, p. 54). Our present epoch of large-scale human migration, species decline, and other alarming features calls for a new Gothic poetry. By drawing attention to under-recognized poets, providing fresh readings of their work, and identifying various modes of Gothic poetry, my thesis contributes to the development of a Gothicised poetics of displacement. I hope my research will be of interest to poets seeking new forms of expression, and to academics looking to literature as a lens through which to examine issues such as climate crisis or global displacement.

Part 2: The Ends of the Earth: EcoGothic Effects

A Reflective Commentary on the Creative Work

> In the teeth of the polar night, I am going
> Far,
> And when I drop my skeleton will linger
> Not much longer than the bones of a snow-flake
> On the road leading
> North.
>
> 'A Walk in the Wind', Helen Adam (1966)

In the summer of 2019 Siberian hunters came upon the astonishingly well-preserved head of a giant ice-age wolf, unburied after nearly half-a-thousand centuries of sleep. That autumn, as I was starting my PhD and seeking a suitably Gothic subject for the practice-based component of my research, I stumbled across a newspaper article (*Siberian Times*, 2019) about the discovery of the extinct creature, and this happenstance was the inciting incident for my investigation into how climate crisis is transforming the literary topography of the frozen north. This research appears in Chapter 3 of the critical part of the thesis, 'Defrosting the Gothic: Arctic Poetry in a Melting Sublime'. A parallel creative project tracks this climate-affected landscape in my ecoGothic poetry sequence *Effects:Poems*, which has itself emerged in response to numerous accounts of ice-age cryptids. Just like zombies, the animal undead keep rising from the thawing necrofields of the north.

Specifically, over recent decades, melting Siberian permafrost is revealing the remains of extinct animalia, Pleistocene creatures such as woolly mammoths, rhinos, cave bears and canids. Robert MacFarlane (2019) describes these Ice Age unburials as 'uncanny signs', and while I have introduced this idea in Chapter 3, MacFarlane's concept bears repeating here:

> These Anthropocene unburials, as I have come to think of them, are proliferating around the world. Forces, objects and substances thought safely confined to the underworld are declaring themselves above ground with powerful consequences. It is easy to aestheticise such events, curating them into a *Wunderkammer* of weirdness. But they are not curios – they are horror shows. Nor are they portents of what is to come – they are the uncanny signs of a crisis that is already here. (para. 3)

These harbingers of global heating serve as an area of inquiry for a poetics engaged with writing Arctic Gothic as ecoGothic. Ice-age exhumations provide source material for both

de-extinction science cloning attempts and a black market in mammoth tusks, and the quest for valuable tusks has in turn caused environmental damage to Siberian riverbanks. Amos Chapple documents the extraction of ice-ivory in his 2016 photo essay *The Mammoth Pirates*, capturing tusk-hunters at work in Siberia; Chapple's reportage, Evgenia Arbugaeva's 2020 photography series *The Mammoth Hunters*, and various other reports of exhumed prehistoric animals are primary sources of the imagery and events that informed my composition of *Effects.*

The various news articles that document the 2019 discovery of the Siberian wolf invariably feature a photo of the cryptid's decapitated head, which is all that was found of him, neatly sliced at the neck by a guillotine of ice. With hindsight, it occurs to me that as a source of inspiration, this head belongs to a tradition in early Norse literature identified by Nora Kershaw Chadwick in her 1942 study *Poetry and Prophecy*, where 'Othin's chief mantic accessory is a preserved human head which he is in the habit of consulting as an oracle' (p. 10). Similarly, writes Chadwick, of Irish, Welsh, and Norse traditions:

> The dead are among the commonest sources of inspiration. It may be preserved human heads, like the head of Mimir, which is said to have told the Norse god Othin 'many hidden things'. (1942, p. 50)

Chadwick prefers the term 'mantic' to 'prophetic' because 'prophetic' refers to a declaration of knowledge pertaining to the future that is obtained by revelation or inner light, whereas 'mantic' 'may be used just as well for the *possession* or *cultivation* as for the *declaration* of knowledge' (xiv). So, to be clear, regarding my process here, I am no prophet or shaman; the wolf head declared itself and spoke to me, and the poems attempt to cultivate the knowledge embodied in such a telling disinterment.

The term 'effects' means both 'consequence' and 'aesthetic result' – hence my title *Effects*, intended to be suggestive of the consequences of climate change, while also referencing my practice-based exploration into how ecoGothic poetry functions via my own experiments in contemporizing Gothic poetic forms. The short poem 'Siberian Spring', whose title is indebted to Rebecca Carson's 1962 book on pesticides, *Silent Spring*, serves as prologue to the sequence, which is composed of three sections: *Tuskers*, *Wunderkammer*, and *The River*. Below, I discuss how each of these sections independently functions as a type of ecoGothic, with select poems illustrating how I attempt to achieve these Gothic effects.

***Siberian Times,* June 7th, 2019. Photo: Albert Protopopov**

Tuskers

While researching the prehistoric animals revealed by melting frosts, I came upon Chapple's photo essay about Siberian mammoth-tusk hunters, whose search for ice-ivory, or 'white gold', can be dangerous and environmentally detrimental. The setting and situation, a small community living in extreme conditions in a remote environment, is fertile ground for horror, specifically folk horror. As Dawn Keetley (2020) observes, folk horror is a genre 'frequently propelled […] by the uncovering of ancient artifacts, along with their often malevolent spirits, which serves to demonstrate that the past was never actually "past" at all' (p. 8). In this instance, the artifacts are natural rather than manmade, suggesting an 'eco-folk' horror hybrid being an apt classification for the first section of *Effects*, titled *Tuskers*. *Tuskers* hews to a narrative template described by Adam Scovell (2017) as the 'folk horror chain': this chain begins with a landscape or 'topography' that imposes 'adverse effects on the social and moral identity of its inhabitants' (p. 17). The next elements in the chain are the 'isolation' of a group of individuals due to 'a natural enforcement through circumstance, situation and the landscape itself', where an attendant skewing of 'belief systems and morality' culminates in a horrific 'happening' or 'summoning' (Scovell, 2017, pp. 17–18).

Tuskers depicts mammoth-ivory prospecting and establishes the overall sequence's universe, which we enter through the poem 'Portal', the description of a collapsing Arctic landscape jotted in a scientist's journal. The scientist who appears throughout *Effects* is distant kin to the minstrel of Walter Scott's 1805 narrative poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, yet rather than relaying the past through the frame of a performed ballad, this figure functions as an embedded observer, and is implicated in events rather than framing them from a remote vantage point. He is also the proto-typical outsider of folk horror, an urban person entering a rural setting, purportedly a place 'of exploration' that turns out to be 'alien' and dangerous:

> The danger can be from those who work the soil or those who want to kill for the soil, from things excavated from under the soil, from objects that sit confidently or uncannily upon the soil, or indeed from the very soil itself (Scovell, 2017, p. 38).

The italicised lines in 'Portal' represent scientific observation mixed with the scientist's internal commentary, a technique used in numerous poems in both *Tuskers* and *The River*. The redactions in 'Portal' are his attempt to look away from the frightening effects of climate crisis, a failed strategy since in 'Secret Recipe' we learn that 'He can't un- / see what he has seen, the things / released and arisen / in the shortest night'.

Functioning like an establishing shot, the poem 'Tusk Hunters' must stand alone while also setting the scene for the longer narrative. [76] The challenge here was to provide sufficient context without disrupting pace or mood, and to end the poem on a note that felt complete yet foreshadows what is to follow. Rather than using a formal structure with end-rhyme, I rely on effects such as internal rhyme and alliteration to give the poem its auditory texture; for instance, the onomatopoeia of the sibilant phrase, 'shattering the mute sleep of spruce', soundscapes human intrusion in a quiet forest. The opening lines of 'Tusk Hunters' include words like 'moiling' borrowed from Robert Service's 1907 supernatural ballad 'The

[76] My slippage into film terminology to describe my process and poetry sequence – inciting incident, *mise-en-scène*, establishing shot – makes some sense if we take up Tom Hillard's (2019) thought experiment: '*Imagine if ecocriticism were a horror film'*: […] 'We've reached that point in the film […] where a curious protagonist opens the basement or cellar door, and with a flashlight (or some other uncertain light source) steps cautiously down the stairs. We're unsure what's going to happen next, and the tension mounts. Who or what will be there? Then, upon turning that corner, suddenly thrown into dim but unmistakable relief, is a mouldering corpse' (p. 24).

Cremation of Sam McGee', which is set in the Yukon's Gold Rush era. I hope this allusion to another kind of resource extraction adds historical resonance, and that some of Service's Gothic sheen rubs off on my diction. For readers not familiar with Service's work, I have flagged the section with an epigraph from Service's poem.

The loosely episodic narrative in *Tuskers* culminates in a feast, and the *mise-en-scène* is a tuskers' camp. The last link in Scovall's folk horror chain is the 'happening / summoning', an event that, as James Thurgill (2020) points out, fetishizes 'folk communities as oppositional to modernity':

> The type of horrorism that unfolds from folk horror is almost exclusively orchestrated and actioned by humans: *auto-da-fé*, beheading, bloodletting, cannibalism, drowning, hanging, dismembering. (p. 42)

The ultimate 'summoning' in *Effects* is deferred until the final sequence, *The River*, but, as I discuss below, a proxy for cannibalism occurs in the Midsummer celebration, a drunken bacchanal replete with violence (folk horror's 'skewed morality').

The equinox in the poem 'Midsummer's Eve' is a temporal threshold (a nod to a typical folk horror calendar motif), and the poem literalizes the danger from things under the soil:

> As the prehistoric carapace of ice softens
> something sleeping in the soil
> seeps out. A toothless old
> husky bitch growls at the enemy
> hiding out there in the half-dark.
>
> At the campsite something
> silent as gas, unseen as bacteria,
> coils around their ankles […].

Here the 'folk', or tuskers, are subject to the same environmental threat as the scientist (the poem conjures a generic evil miasma, but such a breach could, in theory and probability, release active organisms such as anthrax).[77] If the guard dog seems familiar, that's because

[77] Revivified ice-age anthrax, parasites and worms have been discovered in permafrost. In the 2015 ecohorror TV series *Fortitude*, set in a fictional Arctic mining outpost, a mammoth corpse infects humans with prehistoric parasites – these carriers commit gruesome murders in order to transmit larvae to other host bodies.

we've met her in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's unfinished 1816 poem 'Christabel'– 'Sir Leoline, the Baron rich, / Hath a toothless mastiff bitch' (p. 281, ll. 6–7). There, the dog warns against an unspecified sinister entity that comes from the forest in the shape of a woman. [78]

'Widdershins' takes its title from a Scottish term from folklore associated with a belief that to walk against the sun's course draws bad luck. The poem suggests that this action causes time to turn backwards, hence wakening animal zombies by calling them up from the earth. The trudging rhythm of the 'Necromancers of the soil' is deliberately repetitive:

> like drays yoked to the miller's gin
> they plod the fire widdershins
> and wind time's auger west to east [.]

The poem is an incantation, what Robin Skelton (1978) describes as 'a mode of speech […] used in many kinds of spell' (p. 45) [79]. The power of this form, says Skelton, resides in its hypnotic or mantra-like techniques, with the objective of putting 'the conscious critical intelligence to sleep so that the intuitive element can have full play' (1978, p. 45). This particular incantation is conditional – *when* the stew bubbles, *when* the wolf-star appears, *when* the moon shines, *when* revenant beasts arise – and sets forth the terms under which the feast can commence (a rhetorical formula I have borrowed from *Macbeth's* witches). The chanted contrapuntal couplets in italics give a collective voice to the spell-makers, placing them (and the reader) in what Skelton describes as 'a specific desired state of mind' (1978, p. 45).

---

[78] 'Outside her kennel, the mastiff old
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.
The mastiff old did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make!
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?'

(Coleridge, Part One composed 1797, published 1816, ll. 140–44)

[79] '[B]y the word incantatory I mean not only that it is in the form of a chant or song (Lat. *cantare*: to sing), but that it proceeds by cumulation and repetition rather than by logical or narrative stages' (Skelton, 1978, p. 36).

The plodding cadence and overdetermined horror imagery in 'Widdershins', such as that simmering pot of 'grue'– to borrow Helen Adam's term for one of her staple poetic ingredients – attempts to create a mood of pagan ritual. Per Adam Scovell's formula, folk horror 'creates its own folklore' to 'imbue itself with a sense of the arcane for eerie, uncanny or horrific purposes' (p. 7); accordingly, the heathen elements of my made-up Midsummer's Eve celebration are meant to conjure a creepy atmosphere beyond the scientist's ken. The camp feast, however, is not entirely of my own invention, as that cooking pot, with its stewing reindeer bones and nearby skull, is captured in Chapple's photos.

By 'camp', I mean both setting and the self-conscious performativity of the feast poems, as the tone here verges on mock-Gothic. 'Banquet', hinting that the tuskers consume defrosted ice-age meat, riffs on urban lore that mammoth was served at a gala in New York City in 1951: 'they sup the same exotic fare / served up at the Explorers Club, New York'.[80] The reference to the disastrous 1845 Franklin expedition is a reminder that the crews of the *HMS Terror* and *Erebus* ultimately resorted to cannibalism when their ships were stranded in the Arctic:

> Spirits in the stead of wine,
> but the course on which they dine
> – *not horse, worse* – is fine, and rarer
> than the *soup de jour* on Franklin's *Terror*.

As we learn in 'Secret Recipe', the scientist as dinner guest has partaken of the spoils, and the horrorism – to apply James Thurgill's term to this happening – resides in the postprandial realisation that he has broken a fleshy taboo:

> *Does it taste like chicken?*
> Don't ask. Don't tell.

[80] The Explorers Club has a tradition of serving exotic dinners, such as the infamous 1951 frozen Alaskan mammoth meal. The story developed a secondary legend, that the dish served was actually Giant Sloth, or *Megatherium*. Glass, et al (2016) conducted gene-sequencing analysis on a sample of the meat (preserved in the holdings of the Yale Peabody Museum) and identified it as Giant Sea Turtle. The scientists acknowledge 'it is possible that members of the Club actually consumed *Megatherium* or mammoth meat [if the specimen was] a sample from the wrong dish; however, this seems unlikely.' (Glass, et al, 2016, para. 14).

Wunderkammer

The contrarily titled *Wunderkammer* is a cabinet of curiosities – 'horror shows', as MacFarlane would have it – that exhibits animal bodies recently exhumed from Siberian peat bogs, sink holes, and tusk extraction sites: poems that have arisen from fertile (if unhallowed) ground as the permafrost keeps yielding fresh cadavers. The displaying of exotic taxidermy and other *memento mori* was fashionable among 'aristocrats, physicians, art patrons and apothecaries' during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Jones, 2018, p. 90). David Anwnn Jones (2018) notes the Gothic propensities of such collections:

> it is not surprising that cabinets of curiosity housing such memento as well as diverse dried reptiles, mummies, baby crocodiles in fluid, preserved embryos, rich corals, wax death masks, stuffed bats, shells and holy relics should be claimed as Gothic. (2018, p. 89)

These 'proto-museums, cabinets, *Kunstschrank* ("art cupboard") or *Wunderkammers*' also held 'exempla of the deformed: monstrous foetuses with extraneous limbs, double-headed lizards, strange hybrid creatures, which […] transgress[ed] the boundaries of genus and species' (Jones, 2018, p. 90).

Rachel Poliquin (2012) describes a prodigious array of 'category-shattering' oddities imported from Africa and other far-off places into European ports at the height of the sixteenth century's 'age of wonder' (p. 18):

> Whatever was rare in occurrence, exotic in origin, or in any way unusual or curious, prodigious, or outlandish was avidly collected. Collectors mingled artifacts indiscriminately in chaotic displays of visual delight. Strange fish and mummified reptiles hung from the ceiling, stuffed birds and mammals lined the walls, shells and dried reptiles were arranged in drawers, and pickled sea creatures stood in glass jars in open cabinets. (p. 16)

The catholicity of such collections and their jumbling together of 'atavistic myth and dawning scientific reality' (Hoare, 2014, para. 4) gave me the notion that I might create a similar textual space, where a found poem based on an archaic prescription for the uses of rhino horn could sit next to a narrative of de-extinction scientists at their necromantic toil and other assorted poems, one about a mammoth tusk, or the freakish ice mummies of extinct Pleistocene animals.

Wunderkammer curates these defrosted Siberian cryptids by responding to specific emphases placed on their peculiarities in journalistic accounts, with excerpts from headlines serving as museum object labels or title cards. The already curated presentation of these creatures by various media outlets ranges from the scientific to the sensational, depending on the source – for instance, this enthusiastic bit of hucksterism from *The Daily Mail*:

> The hound from hell: Severed 16-inch head of a giant Ice Age wolf – nearly TWICE the size of its modern-day descendants – is found amazingly preserved in Siberian permafrost after 40,000 years. (Stewart, 2019, headline)

Indeed, many of these ice-age species are designated 'giant' – Giant Wolf, Giant Cave Bear, Mammoth (in its adjectival sense) – and their colossal size, an attribute of the Kantian sublime held in common with Frankenstein's monster, contributes to their freakdom.[81]

In its presentation of these defrosted ice-age cryptids, *Wunderkammer* follows an ethos suggested by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996a): 'The monster commands, "Remember Me": restore my fragmented body, piece me back together, allow the past its eternal return' (pg. ix). And, in obeying the command of these revenants, my process of anatomizing them is resurrectionist (in the grave-robber sense). 'Woolly Rhino', for example, proceeding from the epigraphic inventory of body parts, starts as an ode on the vessel-like properties of the animal/object. The horn stub is imagined as a magical key, and the speculative last stanza posits the tantalizing potential of revivification (rhino as automaton, perhaps):

> Or the forehead's busted stump, rude key
> rusted in a lock – oh, to turn it!
> to feel the antique tumblers churn
> then *click* within the shaggy brow!

'Lenskaya Horse' similarly urges a re-membering, in this instance with a summoning or bidding spell. Like the incantation in 'Widdershins', this poem is what Skelton would call a 'preparatory spell' (p. 45). Both segments of 'Lenskaya Horse' commence with an invocation, or address, then proceed to enumerate the foal's properties. As Skelton explains,

[81] Barbara Freeman (1987) identifies a conundrum in Immanuel Kant's attempt to shield the sublime from its own monstrous potential with such edicts as this: 'Sublime states of mind must be produced by *colossal* but not *monstrous* representations of nature' (par. 26, p. 91, cited in Freeman, p. 22). Freeman's parsing of Kant's 1790 *Critique of Judgement* is referenced at length in Chapter 3.

the function of the invocation is a 'beginning, and it leads toward other acts' (p. 36): 'in the summoning spell, the speaker assumes power over that which he is summoning' by mustering that power through the invocation (p. 45). In the first section of 'Lenskaya Horse', this address is clinical and factually descriptive – the 'Bog Dobbin, *Equus lenensis*' is caked with clay, and contains the 'world's oldest blood'. The second section, which metaphorically casts the creature as 'an antique instrument', commences with a formal invocatory naming: 'Little Horse of the Apocalypse'. All of this is in preparation for the spell's ultimate command: 'Rise stallion, whinny, flick your black tail!'.

Regarding the cultural function of monsters as warnings, Cohen (1996b) writes that the monster is 'a displacement, […] inhabit[ing] the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again' (p. 4). The corpses of both 'Woolly Rhino' and 'Lenskaya Horse' express such temporal displacement. The rhino's entrails are a metaphorical rope linking 'the wreck's ribbed prow to *When*' and the foal's gaze is 'a dirt-glazed pane through which the past / stares into the now-known *Now*'.

In 'Giant Cave Bear' the monster is reanimated by climate change, and the sun is the revivifying agent. This poem, partly modelled after Seamus Heaney's (2006) 'The Tollund Man in Springtime', engages the perspective of a newly re-awoken bog body. Both man and bear are sentient and depicted as situating themselves through sensory images. In Heaney's poem, as 'the levered sod / got lifted up', the 'unatrophied' Tollund Man feels the air and likens himself to 'turned turf in the breath of God' (p. 55, ll. 24–28). The Cave Bear, with her well-preserved snout, 'scents peat bogs roasting and the estranged / ursine stink of her own meat self'. Just as the Tollund Man, emerging from 'another world, unlearnable', encounters modernity in the form of 'queues / Of wired, far-faced smilers' (p. 57, ll. 65–69), the Cave Bear experiences a similar (if somewhat Lovecraftian) sighting:[82]

> her vision a prophecy here writ
> in the catalogue of lower orders
> feather berry fin

[82] By Lovecraftian, in this instance, I refer to H.P. Lovecraft stories that feature monstrous subhuman creatures living in caves or other subterranean realms, typically depicted as cannibalistic, base, and otherwise repugnant.

a thing
raw cud-muscle swaddled in dead skins
at lurch in the distant shimmer [.]

Heaney's first-person bog poems, his dramatic monologues, create tension between the dead and the living, especially when the mummified human bodies experience themselves objectified as curiosities. 'The Tollund Man in Springtime' evinces an ironic awareness of his status as a museum piece, gathering 'From the display-case peat [his] staying powers' (2006, p. 56, ll. 46–47).[83] Alternately, 'Bog Queen' is a testimony in which the speaker decries the theft of her hair, an artifact acquired by 'a peer's wife' who bribes the turfcutter:

My skull hibernated
in the wet nest of my hair.

Which they robbed.
I was barbered
and stripped
by a turfcutter's spade [.] (1998a, p. 113, ll. 39–44)

The internal dialogue of animal cadavers did not readily lend itself to the same sort of poetic rendering, I found, and it is by osmosis rather than conscious adoption that Heaney's influence appears in my own ice-mummy exhibits; however, I must acknowledge a resemblance between Heaney's 'Strange Fruit' and 'Giant Wolf Head'. Like all Heaney's bog body poems, 'Strange Fruit' is a meticulous study in description, here of a 'Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible, / Beheaded girl', whose hair, like the Bog Queen's, is 'made an exhibition' (1998b, p. 119, l. 4); the poem presents the girl's head, material evidence of a crime, like fruit on a platter: 'Here is the girl's head like an exhumed gourd. / Oval-faced, prune-skinned, prune-stones for teeth' (1998b, pg. 119, ll. 1–2).[84] My own ekphrastic

[83] This is the last of a career-spanning triptych of Tollund Man poems, and the persona here is a metonymy for Heaney himself, as well as a revivified green man; situating him, as Heaney does, in a world of 'melting icebergs and denuded forests' ('Revisiting an old friend', *The Times*, August 20, 2010, cited in Amiot, 2021, p. 96), Pascale Amiot (2021) notes that 'The bog man's resurrection […] serves an environmental agenda' by juxtaposing 'the natural, pastoral world of the bog' against 'twenty-first century environmental degradation' (p. 96).

[84] Heaney's title draws a deliberate parallel with the American song 'Strange Fruit', composed by Abel Meeropol and recorded by Billie Holiday in 1939. Also ekphrastic, the song is a response to a photo of a public lynching, and describes a form of murder in which the victims are made exhibits (see Chapter 3, p. 41 of this thesis for more on the lyrics of the song 'Strange Fruit' and its context).

decapitation poem presents a 'Giant Wolf Head' in a series of concrete images, but as an instrument rather than recipient of violence:

> The head rests on the neatly sawed sill
> of its being, a sprung trap
> still dreaming stale visions of kill.

The topographical (below/above ground) and temporal (past/present) displacement of bog bodies and ice-mummies is quintessentially Gothic, with the breaching of such boundaries signifying category crisis. The 'Black Dog of Tumat' is a mummified canine pup not classifiable as either dog or wolf, and this indeterminacy – what Jones might call a 'strange, hybrid creature' or Poliquin 'category-shattering' – is yet another type of category crisis that renders it freakish. The dog's corpse is an ark (or cabinet), containing an ancient piece of woolly rhinoceros skin, and the poem culminates with scientists extracting genomic secrets in their attempts to clone an ancient beast. This poem questions the ethics of such a resurrection, and leaves dangling the prospect of unintended consequences, should the Frankensteinian aims of the de-extinction scientists be achieved:

> We, the resurrectionists, our fearless cause
> to decrypt that bitten brail and loose
> a woolly rhino from time's jaws;
> we, who prayed before the doghead
> to revive the dead and break old laws
> that monsters might prowl the earth unbidden –
>
> we did not pause. We did not
> hear it growling.

Poliquin observes that, in the age of wonder, 'curiosities were collected because they acted as portals' through which Europeans could possess 'outlandish creatures' from distant and exotic lands (2012, p. 18); Laurence Weschler similarly argues that 'the palpable reality of such artifacts […] vastly expanded the territory of the now readily conceivable' (1996, p. 80, cited in Poliquin, 2012, p. 16). The palpable reality of the scale of climate change is also made readily conceivable in the Pleistocene artifacts coming up out of the ground, and out of the past. Regarding a renewed interest in wonder cabinets – 'macabre, colonial throwback[s]' – Philip Hoare (2014, byline) suggests their 'revival speaks to our own vexed relationship with the natural world, at a time when we seem bent on destroying it' (para. 4). *Wunderkammer* expresses a similar vexation, offering an ecoGothic portal into a revealed

Arctic underworld, by exhibiting specimens whose presence provokes not wonder and delight but horror and fear.

The River

Amos Chapple's account of two ice-ivory prospectors who drowned while transporting a valuable mammoth tusk along a dangerous Siberian waterway inspired the narrative of the final section of *Effects*, *The River*, which I classify as ecohorror. Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland (2019), identifying 'crossovers […] between ecohorror and ecoGothic', note the centrality of the nonhuman world to the Gothic generally, for instance, in canonic works such as *Frankenstein* where 'the natural world is dominant both as setting and as character' (p. 2). An agentic natural world is even more pronounced in ecohorror, a 'well-established' term associated with 1970's 'creature features':

> it accompanied the popularisation of environmentalism and is generally interpreted as a genre label, as a *type* of horror fiction. For the most part, it is used to describe texts in which *Nature fights back* and in which there is a distinct environmental message which seeks to raise awareness and even incite action. (Parker and Poland, 2019, p. 10)

That human will be pitted against landscape is foreshadowed in the poem that opens the section. 'Riddle' borrows from traditions in which riddles were a form of contest. Chadwick traces the 'competitive spirit' of riddling to various early shamanic practices and world literatures – Sanskrit, Tatar, Norse and Irish oral and written texts – observing that in all instances what is most prized, in addition to 'poetic diction and skill', is 'knowledge of natural – or unnatural natural – history, and of the physical universe' (1942, p. 48). Lowry Charles Wimberly (1965) details how 'riddlecraft' appears, also, in British folk ballads, where it is deployed 'within the jurisdiction of the Otherworld' by 'Preternatural beings […] to get mortals under their power' (p. 301). Often, the penalty for a wrong answer is death (Wimberley, 1965, p. 310). In *Effects*, the opponent is the river, and – to extend the inference that the river as character is a preternatural being – a potentially deadly one. 'Riddle' both poses *and* answers its own questions, but the ominous answer to the final riddle – 'River friend or river foe?' – is ambiguous regarding which entity holds that knowledge, the drowned or the river itself: 'Who lies beneath the river knows.'

In ecohorror mode, *The River* poems variously portray the Siberian riverscape as hungry, powerful, headstrong, adversarial, and confounding. In 'The River's Edge', for

instance, the river has ‘thoughts’, ‘recall’, a ‘tongue’ and a ‘mind’, attributes of sentience and animality, and is depicted as a metaphorical dog:

> With sly insistence the river
> slurps at the aluminium keel –
> dog worrying a well-gnawed bone.

In ‘Tails’, the scientist reads the landscape as unreliable and the river as possessing both muscular power and special knowledge, or ‘dark arts’; ‘Pilgrims’ hints that the scientist and his travelling companions have taken for granted a sort of treaty between human and nature – ‘the pact between water and keel’. Even the dog, watchful companion animal of *Tuskers*, is here the agent of an antagonistic topography – the ‘sly psychopomp, / plier of doom’ in ‘Toll’, for instance. In ‘Figurehead’, she is one of the ‘guardians who guide the bows of ships’, but sets an unpromising course:

> Glacier-blue the half-blind gaze
> wielded from the deck; dreadful the claws
> that clack and shield of teeth aloft the drink,
> a thread of drool unspooling on the breeze –
> the boat tacks west, into the sun’s pink jaws.

And in ‘Snake’, as the boat keeps circling back to the same place, the scientist, knowing he is outwitted, admits he ‘cannot fathom / the cold cogitations of reptilian deep’.

The River sequence follows a (very) loose variation upon the crown, or corona, a form which circles back on itself. The shape of Seamus Heaney’s ‘The Tollund Man in Springtime’, a modified crown of six sonnets, charted a course for this section of *Effects*, which relies on almost-sonnets (pseudo sonnets?) interspersed with several other sorts of poems to move the story episodically. Adapting this form allowed for a story-board approach, like brief scenes or comic book panels; I think of the individual poems here as moments in a contiguous scroll, or tapestry – the metaphoric tapestry, for instance, in ‘Snake’– contributing to the narrative’s inexorable flow, in which the story is a slow ‘peristalsis’ carrying the reader along with it (one hopes): ‘*if the river is a snake / it is swallowing its own tale*.’

A more important map for this sequence, however, is Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*. My ‘river as snake’ metaphor borrows from the seaman Charlie Marlow’s reminiscence of being ‘charmed’ by the image of the river Congo on a map of Africa:

> But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird— a silly little bird. (pp. 11–12)

The spell of topography upon the European company agents who accompany Marlow upriver is evident in his scathing characterisation of them as bewitched, greedy, foolish 'pilgrims' in thrall to elephant ivory:

> They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. (1899, p. 34)

My poem 'Pilgrims' portrays a similar devotion to ice-ivory:

> they cut the engine to save petrol
> and row, pilgrims ploughing a black field
> the moon has sown with sheaves of light,
> saints bearing a burnished scythe –
> sharp tip of mammoth tooth [.]

Against the usual format of a corona, I have titled the sonnets to make each one discrete and slow the pace, taking inspiration from Conrad's riverbank set pieces, in which rapacious company officers senselessly despoil the landscape or pyjama-clad colonials are marooned in rustic encampments. In *Heart of Darkness*, '[g]oing up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world' (1899, p. 51); 'Theme Song' recreates this impression, where the journey leads to

> bleakness, a hellish grey void. They enter
> a landscape stripped back to beginnings.
> A treeless reach emerges from the fog,
> and the muffled sounds of men toiling –
> a graveyard scrape of spade against wet soil [.]

The poem 'Mudmen' draws on Conrad's surreal depictions of riverbank settlements, as well as Evgenia Arbugaeva's photos of tuskers along sludge-filled Siberian waterways:

a hut of grassy clods shingled with skulls,
its door scavenged from shipwreck. Shin bones
adorn the lintel where a man sits sipping
tea from tin cup and guarding his ivory pile [.]

The self-contained drift of these *River* sonnets needed a disruption to depict the boat's sinking. In 'Like Lead', the rollicking rhythm and circularity of repetitive diction convey a sense of movement and drama as scientist and crew circle the proverbial drain:

The ivory truss *fell off, and sank*
like lead unto the lee; it tipped the boat
and dragged it down to depths
too deep to see.

The mammoth tusk is the albatross that sinks the boat, and the italicised lines in 'Like Lead' are, of course, adapted from Coleridge's 1798 poem 'The Rime of The Ancyent Marinere': 'The Albatross fell off, and sank / like lead into the sea' (IV ll. 282–83) (Mr. Kurtz himself, the object of Marlow's quest and a sort of ivory albatross around the seaman's neck, similarly ends up overboard after he dies on the voyage home).[85]

Unlike *Heart of Darkness*, a novella structured on a return, *The River* is a one-way trip. The ultimate summoning of *Effects* occurs in 'Toll', when the two tuskers drown: 'a pair of coins tendered to cross over.'[86] The human sacrifice in *The River* does not spur a regeneration of nature, as it might were *Effects* straight-up folk horror. It instead represents the actual perils of mammoth tusk hunting by leaning into ecophobia. This trope is but one aspect of ecohorror, however, and as Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles (2021) point out, there is a flip side:

> although ecohorror includes nature strikes-back narratives (the type that may first come to mind), it also includes 'texts in which humans do horrific things to the natural world, or in which horrific texts and tropes are used to promote ecological awareness, represent ecological crises, or blur human/non-human distinctions more broadly.' (Rust and Soles, 2014, pp. 509-10, cited in Tidwell and Soles, 2021, pp. 13–14)

[85] When Marlow finally meets Kurtz, the 'voracious' ivory agent has become 'an animated image of death carved out of old ivory' (Conrad, 1899, p. 91).

[86] While this toll alludes to River Styx mythology, I also had in mind Wimberley's observation that the Otherworld itinerants in folk ballads must pay a fee to the devil, as discussed in Chapter 2 of the critical thesis.

The unidentified corpse in *Heart of Darkness*, source of the moral stench of the wanton ivory trade, is both elephant and environment.[87] The Congo, like the Siberian tusk dig sites, was in actuality an ecological catastrophe, and Marlow's description, illustrative of that other aspect of ecohorror, is worth quoting here:

> the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. (Conrad, 1899, p. 21)

When I started working on *The River* sequence, I reread *Heart of Darkness* to see how Conrad had handled the river journey narrative, forgetting that his novel had in common with *Effects* an 'overheated' resource extraction setting, and that the commodity in both was 'ivory' – 'fossil' ivory even, in *Heart of Darkness*, dug up from buried stockpiles when supplies ran low (Conrad, 1899, p. 74). There were other congruences and inspirations, such as the spectre of cannibalism and 'certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites' (Conrad, 1899, p. 76). But the echo of eco-system degradation in Siberia is the most striking similarity, particularly when considering Amos Chapple's observation that tusk hunters no longer brought fishing poles on expeditions because '[t]he river there ran like hot chocolate and the fish were gone' (2016 interview, cited in MacDonald, 2017, n.p.). The depiction of environmental damage in *Effects* is muted in comparison to the excerpt from *Heart of Darkness*, yet is present in some poems, such as 'Tuskers', where

> Men in helmets and hip-boots
> point the petrol-sheened river
> through hoses heavy as elephant trunks,
> drilling a determined plume
> of sluice into the secret-keeping soil,
> interrogating stones and the tense,
> clasped roots of trees.

[87] Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy (2009), providing background context for *Heart of Darkness*, notes that between '1875 to 1905, Europeans extracted 70,000 tons of ivory from the Congo every year' (p. 621). The novel, argues McCarthy, depicts 'an economy whose fructifying power is extinct', and offers compelling textual evidence for his conclusion: 'the elephant in the room, for all the novel's talk of ivory, is the distinct lack of elephants. […] [I]n the novel the word appears to have been hunted to extinction' (2009, p. 621).

The poem ‘Tails’ opens on an image of ‘dead fish awash in the shallows’, and, in ‘The River’s Edge’, ‘saplings […] cling / to the steep, disintegrating shoreline’ where the river is clogged with ‘a sludge of liquified land slid / down from the digs.’

Heart of Darkness arguably can be classified under the Gothic subset of what Sharae Deckard (2022) terms ‘extractive gothic’:

> Extractive gothic fictions are often global in their horizon even when rooted at specific local sites of extraction; they are not only ecogothic, but globalgothic […]: permeated with a systemic consciousness of the world-scale of imperialist and capitalist extraction, and of the accelerating planetary impacts of energy and resource extraction, whether as global warming or other forms of ecological catastrophe. (pp. 1–2)

While extractive ecohorror is generally understood to be focused on energy resources – such as oil, or coal – it is inclusive of any sort of industrialised extraction that goes too deep, says Deckard, ‘unearthing monsters or excavating horrifying substances that pollute or infect the topside’ (2022, p. 3).[88] Twenty-first century examples tend to express ‘a growing sense of apprehension of the end of nature as we know it, in an age of climate emergency and mass extinction’ (Deckard, 2022, p. 3).

My sequence, *Effects*, its eco-folk horror and ecohorror narratives propelled by the unearthing of prehistoric animals and the extraction of mammoth tusks, its cabinets of curiosity populated by ice-mummies, might also be classified as an extractive ecoGothic. The end point is bleak, as we leave the scientist stranded in the dog-eat-dog ‘primordial ooze’ of the penultimate poem ‘Survival’. ‘The Ends of the Earth is a Lonely Place’, the title of the final poem, expresses a prophetic universal solastalgia. My method is also extractive, pulling imagery, tropes and ideas from the bodies of earlier texts, and my sequence is intended as a contribution to an ecoGothic literature of effects, in both senses of the word. The deliberately antique tenor of my poetry references the Gothic tradition, and in their engagements with the past, these poems embody my own fascination with the existential horrors announced by climate change and Siberian permafrost unburials.

[88] See above, fn. 77, re 2015 TV series *Fortitude* – mining and melting permafrost result in a remote community being infected by ice-age parasites from an unearthed mammoth corpse.

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Part 3: *Effects*

EFFECTS: POEMS [redacted]

[Part III of this thesis is redacted and under indefinite embargo
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