Haunted Empire: Gothic Japanism in British Literature of *Fin de Siècle*

Sammy Aiko Zimmerman, University of Chicago

Abstract

As Japan reconstituted itself along the lines of modernity in the aftermath of the Meiji Revolution (1868), British interpreters struggled to make sense of the emergent Oriental imperial state, which seemed full of puzzles and contradictions. From their attempts to narrate the strangeness they found in Japan arose a literary subgenre I call "Gothic Japanism." This paper examines British popular writings on Japan between 1868 and 1904, focusing on three Gothic images—the ghost, the Doppelgänger, and the corpse—which appear in British accounts of Japan in order to demonstrate the reciprocal process by which the Gothic conditioned the creation of the idea of Japan and, in turn, Japan sustained a sense of the Gothic within the modern world. Though the sympathies between the Gothic genre and the idea of Japan were multiple, I argue that they engendered ultimately an anxiety about the limits of the knowable and the transgression of limits within the known, an anxiety which tended to unsettle the universalizing project of Western modernity.

> "The dream: to know a foreign (alien) language and yet not to understand it: to perceive the difference in it without that difference ever being recuperated by the superficial sociality of discourse, communication or vulgarity; to know, positively refracted in a new language, the impossibilities of our own; to learn the systematics of the inconceivable; to undo our own 'reality' under the effect of other formulations, other syntaxes; to discover certain unsuspected positions of the subject in utterance, to displace the subject's topology; in a word, to descend into the untranslatable, to experience its shock without ever muffling it..."
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> —Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*[1]

> "In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people... the Japanese people are, as I have said, simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art."
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> —Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying"[2]

Introduction: A Funeral Parade

On January 7, 1868, Algernon Bertram Mitford saw a strange sight on the streets of Osaka: a procession of troops "who looked as if they had stepped out of some old pictures of the Gem-Pei wars in the Middle Ages... Hideous masks of lacquer and iron, fringed with portentous whiskers and moustachios, crested helmets with wigs from which long streamers of horsehair floated to their waists, might strike terror into any enemy."[3] This bizarre parade was in fact no supernatural horde but the retinue of Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last shogun of Japan, who had left Kyoto after the seizure of the Imperial Palace by forces supporting the political ascendancy of the Meiji Emperor.[4] They looked, Mitford later wrote, "like the hobgoblins of a nightmare."[5]

Mitford, a thirty-year-old British diplomat, had been stationed in Japan for just over a year.[6] At the end of 1867, he had been sent to Osaka and Kobe alongside fellow British diplomat and Japanologist

1 Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard, *Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 6.

2 Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" (1889, New York: Brentano, 1905), accessed online through UCLA https://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/comm/steen/cogweb/Abstracts/Wilde_1889.html.

3 A.B. Mitford, *Memories* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1915), 418.

4 Mitford, *Memories*, 417; Robert Morton, *A.B. Mitford and the Birth of Japan as a Modern State: Letters Home* (Kent, England: Renaissance Books, 2017), 82.

5 Mitford, *Memories*, 418.

6 Mitford, *Memories*, 407, 411-12.

Ernest Satow, tasked with gathering intelligence in preparation for the opening of the ports of those cities to foreign trade.[7] Osaka, serving at that point as a major stronghold of the shogun's forces, was, in Mitford's words, a "political whirlpool."[8] He and Satow had unwittingly found themselves in the midst of a moment of profound political crisis in Japan. The shogun had formally resigned his position in November, but his political status remained unclear. On January 3, a coalition of samurai households supporting not only the Meiji Emperor but political, economic, and cultural Westernization had finally mustered the force to carry out the coup d'etat which had expelled Yoshinobu from Kyoto. The Boshin War, which would erupt only weeks later, would place the final nail in the coffin of the Tokugawa shogunate, which had ruled Japan for nearly 300 years while the imperial line languished in political impotence. But for Mitford, the ex-shogun's melancholy procession through the streets of Osaka meant that "practically the end had come"—the Tokugawa were as good as defeated, and the era of the "New Japan" under the Meiji Emperor had begun.[9]

There was thus, at least in Mitford's account, a distinctly funereal quality to this procession. Tokugawa Yoshinobu appeared "worn and dejected, looking neither to right nor to the left, his head wrapped in a black cloth, taking notice of nothing."[10] The dress and weaponry—jinbaori, bows and arrows, spears, swords, daggers—of his troops were curiously anachronistic, as though they were medieval ghosts rather than living men. Nor was it beyond Mitford's notice that this procession was a kind of ironic reversal of the victorious Siege of Osaka by Yoshinobu's ancestor Tokugawa Hidetada some two and a half centuries before. "It was," Mitford wrote, in a passage worthy of Sir Walter Scott, "the last entry of a Shogun into the grand old castle which had come into the heritage of the Tokugawa by one tragedy, and was to pass out of their possession by another."[11] The procession was at once the Romantic last ride of a fallen Prince, the haunting of Osaka by a band of ancestral ghosts, and the funeral parade of the "Old Japan" embodied by the Tokugawa clan.

In fact, this incident probably did not take place on the day or in the manner in which Mitford claims to have witnessed it. Other accounts have Yoshinobu fleeing Osaka Castle in secrecy on the night of January 6, earning him censure as a coward and one of the great villains of the late Edo period—a far cry from Mitford's picture of grand ceremony and dignified resignation.[12] But the vivid, fantastical quality of this description, in the writings of a British statesman, provides us with a striking example of the curious convergence between the literary and the political in British attempts to interpret Japan during the last half of the nineteenth century. In particular, Mitford's ghastly account illustrates some of the ways in which the set of conventions associated with the Gothic literary form (supernatural creatures, medieval castles, terror and hideousness married to melancholic beauty) found their way into the British idea of Japan.

The trend far exceeds Mitford; many, if not most, late-nineteenth century British works on Japan are imbued at times with a Gothic sensibility, whether describing the supernatural creatures (*yokai*) of Japanese folklore or the sight of a Shinto shrine in a misty mountain forest. Why was the language of the Gothic so often invoked in the project of interpreting Japan for Anglophone audiences? What did British writers find to be Gothic about Japan, and what did they find to be Japanese about the Gothic? In this paper, I will examine the appearance of Gothic narrative forms, affective modes, and aesthetic categories in late-nineteenth century British writing on Japan, with the hope of illuminating some of the surprising intersections of political knowledge and aesthetic judgment in the production of an idea called "Japan" and a genre which we now identify as the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic.[13] In these intersections I find

7 Mitford, *Memories*, 413; Morton, *Letters Home*, 81-2.

8 Mitford, *Memories*, 413.

9 Mitford, *Memories*, 417.

10 Mitford, *Memories*, 418.

11 Mitford, *Memories*, 418. He refers to the fact that Osaka Castle was besieged and eventually burned by Tokugawa troops in 1615, a key incident in the consolidation of Tokugawa political control and suppression of resistance. The castle would be seized and burned again by pro-Meiji troops in February 1868.

12 Iechika Yoshiki, *Tokugawa Yoshinobu* (Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2014), 336-7.

13 For this study, I have slightly adapted the periodization "*fin de siècle*" to better suit the timeline of Japan-West relations.

a form which I call "Gothic Japanism": a structure of knowledge and reference which imagines Japan as a place familiar and yet strange, suspended between the real and the supernatural; a country of restless ghosts, eerie imitations, things dead and not-quite-dead.

Among the variety of images produced by and associated with the Gothic, I have identified three—the ghost, the Doppelgänger, and the corpse—which were most often mobilized in the attempt to describe Japan and whose aesthetic, political, and philosophical concerns resonate most powerfully with the problems conjured by the British idea of Japan. Each of these images is concerned with the anxiety of the limit—between past and present, Self and Other, life and death—and in particular the uncanny crossings, blurrings, and disintegrations of the limit. At its most self-assured, nineteenth-century British liberal imperialism was committed fundamentally to an epistemology of the limit, where a) "natural" internal limits (e.g. between male and female) were stable and self-evident and b) there was no earthly limit to the knowable and assimilable, that is: the unfamiliar was always only the not-yet-known.[14] At the heart of the Gothic and of the British idea of Japan was, I argue, a gnawing doubt as to the stability of such taxonomies and their claims to universality.

Both the Gothic and the idea of Japan are associated powerfully and tellingly with death: the absolute unknowable, that which can always be reached for but never grasped, the void at the end of all things which swallows the subject and annihilates meaning. The Gothic, as an essentially anti-Enlightenment project, recuperated the "occult," the unnatural, and the unexplainable which liberal rationality attempted to push aside; at the same time, it constantly eroded the taxonomies of the knowable which British liberal imperialism took as universal. If the Gothic constituted an abstract critique of such universalist claims from within the imperial core, Japan, geographically distant and (for nearly three centuries) politically and economically reclusive, represented a real exteriority, an absolute foreignness, a mode of life which was both completely civilized (organized, rational, even modern) and utterly unfamiliar (Oriental, superstitious, backwards).[15]

For the British Empire, the last decades of the nineteenth century saw immense territorial expansion and renewed imperial chauvinism *alongside* a growing doubt in the imperial project, a creeping fear that civilization was driving towards its own end (that is, back into barbarism). As psychoanalyst and historian Daniel Pick has shown, the discourse of degeneration—the rather slippery idea of a kind of social pathogen with the potential to affect racial devolution and ultimately the collapse of Western civilization—is essential to understanding the social criticism, scientific inquiry, and literary production of the latter half of the nineteenth century, and particularly the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic.[16] While fictions and forecasts of degeneration imagined the fall of the Western world, they were also fascinated by the East—most famously China, as manifest in "yellow peril" narratives, but also by Japan—that "topsy-turvy" land, that unreal empire, that place at the other end of the world and beyond the reaches of history.

Though the term usually refers primarily to the 1880s and '90s, my *fin de siècle* begins where this paper does, with the Meiji Revolution of 1868, and ends in 1904 with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War—two events which radically altered both the history of Japan and the history of Japan-West relations. I retain the category of the *fin de siècle*, however, because I wish to highlight the continuities between British representations of Japan and the broader anxiety of the Western world at the turn of the century: the sense of things coming to an end, a vague but pervasive feeling of loss in the face of an obscure future; in a word, the fear of degeneration.

14 Paraphrasing from Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 20-23. Mehta argues that India was the unfamiliarity with which nineteenth century liberalism was constantly confronted: its paradigmatic project of assimilation. I take Japan as essentially the *most extreme case* of such unfamiliarity; this does not, however, preclude other unfamiliarities, such as India, which undoubtedly occupied more space in the imaginative and discursive lives of the Victorians.

15 In a similar vein, Michael Blouin writes: "In one respect, Japan illustrates the fulfillment of Enlightenment promises (a unification of an imaginary East/West); in another respect, and at the very same moment, the archipelago represents everything outside of the Enlightenment project, its unseen or refused elements. In this light, Japan occupies a rather unique— and uncanny— position in relation to American culture." Michael J. Blouin, *Japan and the Cosmopolitan Gothic*, 13-4.

16 Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Indeed, there is a resonance between the ontological uncertainty of Japan in the early- to mid-Meiji period and the uncertainty engendered by the *fin-de-siècle* anxiety of degeneration which exceeds mere superficial resemblance, which is not only a matter of formal rhyme but of essential mutual entanglement. As Mitford watched the last shogun's ghostly procession towards the stronghold of his forebears, he was confronted with such strangeness that the scene seemed to him suspended between reality and fiction. Tokugawa Yoshinobu was transformed from man of flesh and blood to spectral figure of the Japanese past, present, and future; no longer merely a disgraced politician but an otherworldly being who seemed to obey other taxonomies, to inhabit other kinds of space and time. This profound sense of uncertainty and discomfort—the unsettling of the known and unknown, the fluidity of the real and unreal, the strange dance of beauty and terror—was ultimately, I believe, the animating force of the phenomenon I call Gothic Japanism.

Language, Literature, and Historiography: Notes on Method

In order to develop my vision of this Gothic Japan, I will examine key texts on Japan from British writers at the *fin de siècle*, including Mitford's memoir (1915) and his folktale collection *Tales of Old Japan* (1871), lady traveler Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880), the works of eccentric writer Lafcadio Hearn/Koizumi Yakumo (1899-1904), Rudyard Kipling's Japanese letters (1889-1892), Basil Hall Chamberlain's quasi-encyclopedic *Things Japanese* (1890), and Mary Crawford Fraser's novel *The Stolen Emperor* (1904), as well as several popular periodical sources.[17] Through these texts—of which only the works of Hearn and Fraser can be called on the whole "Gothic"—I will pick up and attempt to follow the threads of the Gothic as they run through the tapestry which British writers wove to resemble Japan. I will also pay attention to the ways in which the aesthetic category of "the Japanese" (by which I mean both the British idea of Japan and actual Japanese cultural production) itself altered and expanded the forms of the Gothic. That is, there was not a single motion whereby Anglo aesthetic categories determined the shape of Japan, but a reciprocal process whereby the two apparently distinct categories of the Gothic and the Japanese became historically entangled.

My analysis of these texts must tread a careful line between the real (the dominion of the historian) and the fictional (the domain of the literary critic). The historian might say that Mitford did not "really" see ghosts in Osaka; the critic might dismiss the question of reality and inquire instead into the meanings and functions of the ghosts as literary creations. If my methodology seems to land largely on the side of the critic, I wish also to emphasize that no "real" history of the Japan-West encounter could be complete without accounting for the simultaneous fictionality of Japan—that is, the fictionalization of Japan by Europeans. The majority of the texts I examine here purport to be records of fact, but cannot (or do not try to) avoid making recourse at times to fiction, subjectivity, superstition; others purport to make claims about the "real" Japan *by way of fiction*.[18] To write a cultural history which remains faithful to the ways of thinking and being it attempts to reconstruct, then, means to dwell in the realm of possibility and uncertainty, in the epistemological twilight zone between fact and fiction where Mitford *may or may not have* witnessed the ghostly last ride of the Tokugawa.

If I argue for the literary quality of history, though, I must also take seriously the historicity of literature; I will treat the Gothic genre as a particular, bounded set of linguistic and aesthetic forms which were produced and reproduced in particular historical moments.[19] Briefly, the Anglophone Gothic genre

17 A.B. Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, Macmillan's Colonial Library (London; Macmillan and Co., 1871); Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese; Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan for the Use of Travellers and Others* (Second edition, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1891); Isabella L. Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan: An Account of Travels on Horseback on the Interior, Including Visits to the Aborigines of Yezo and the Shrines of Nikkô and Isé* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1880); Mary Crawford Fraser, *The Stolen Emperor* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1904). In the body of the text I have listed original publication dates for these works, but where indicated I have also drawn on later, sometimes expanded and revised, editions.

18 Bird, Kipling, Chamberlain, and most of the periodicals fall into the first category; Hearn and Fraser fall into the second. Mitford, as will be demonstrated later, falls into both camps, and is thus in some sense our paradigmatic Gothic Japanist author.

19 As opposed to a kind of universal human tendency. Al-

emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century and enjoyed huge commercial success through the Romantic period (roughly 1790-1840), falling out of favor in the mid-century before experiencing a major resurgence at the *fin de siècle*.[20] Scholars have advanced various definitions of this historical Gothic, emphasizing different aspects of the genre, but in general agree that the Gothic is better defined as a handful of overlapping characteristics than a single guiding principle.[21]

I will make reference to several of these Gothic characteristics, but what concerns me here especially is the tendency of the Gothic dredge up the cast-off and uncontainable, "to confront the roots of our beings in sliding multiplicities (from life becoming death to genders mixing to fear becoming pleasure and more) and to define ourselves against these uncanny abjections, while also feeling attracted to them."[22] Enmeshed in the late-Victorian discourses of social Darwinism, racial degeneration, and imperial decline, the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic was particularly obsessed with the contradictions and multiplicities of civilization and modernity.[23] Its defining texts (including *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Dracula, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Beetle*, and *The Great God Pan*) dramatize the intrusion of ancient, terrifying, and inexplicable forces into the mundanity of modern life.

Not coincidentally, many of these dark forces derive more or less explicitly from the non-white world. The Gothic has not been excluded from the realm of postcolonial criticism; indeed scholars have often noted its especially intimate relationship with imperialist and racist discourses (as well as its capacity to critique these discourses).[24] Particularly influential has been Patrick Brantlinger's concept of the "Imperial Gothic," which "combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often quasi-Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult" through the principal themes of "individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities

though I do not deny that, naturally, certain universally-shared human experiences and concerns *are* addressed by the forms of the Gothic, I do not accept the Gothic literary form as a natural and universal aesthetic/affective response to these concerns. To do so would be, I believe, antithetical to the Gothic's own tendency towards *unsettling* the "natural" and "universal."

20 For a brief history of Gothic literature, see Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture" in Jerrold E. Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*; for a more comprehensive treatment see Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1996).

21 Briefly, these characteristics include: heavy stylization and extreme fictionality; narrative structures of concealment/exposure and entrapment/liberation; the use of antiquated or anachronistic settings, characters, and objects; unstable and permeable boundaries, such as those between the real and the supernatural and the human and the inhuman; interest in provoking fear, horror, or repulsion in the reader; anti-Enlightenment assertions of the power of the irrational, supernatural, and unconscious; and a preoccupation with history which may take the form of inheritance, ancestry, memory, hauntings, and/or revenge. In compiling this list, I am synthesizing ideas primarily from David Punter, "Introduction: Dimensions of Gothic," in *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1996); Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture," in Jerrold E. Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ebook; and Andrew Smith and William Hughes, "Introduction: Locating the Victorian Gothic," in Andrew Smith and William Hughes, eds. *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

22 Hogle, "Introduction," in Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*.

23 Drawing here from Kelly Hurley, "British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930" in Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*; Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall, "Fin-de-siècle Gothic," in Andrew Smith and William Hughes eds., *The Victorian Gothic*; Glennis Byron, "Gothic in the 1890s," in David Punter, ed., *A Companion to the Gothic, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture* (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

24 See for example Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003); Howard L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996); Andrew Smith and William Hughes, eds., *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Douglas L. Howard, eds., *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2004).

for adventure and heroism in the modern world."[25] For Brantlinger, the late Victorian Imperial Gothic simultaneously embraces the rationalist, universalist directive of imperialism *and* the ever-present irrational (that is, "native") forces which undermine the imperial project.

Postcolonial studies of the Gothic like Brantlinger's have, for obvious reasons, focused almost exclusively on peoples and territories subject to British rule—mostly Africa, India, and Ireland.[26] But Japan poses a problem to the limited framework of postcolonial critique, which tends to assume West-as-colonizer and East-as-colonized. First strong-armed then feared, both patronized and admired, racialized but not necessarily as inferior, Japan was certainly subject to the type of European knowledge production known as Orientalism, but this Orientalism was somewhat less self-confident than other Orientalisms and did not correspond so clearly to a system of political and economic domination. By the late nineteenth century Japan was, after all, an imperial power in its own right.

Gothic tales of Japan were thus not "Imperial Gothic" in the sense that an imperial power was evaluating the colonized Other through the Gothic language of the dangerous, bestial, and abject, but they were, I contend, a form of "Imperial Gothic" in the sense that one imperial power (the British) was forced to confront its own limits and contradictions when faced with an Oriental empire (the Japanese) which was somehow both civilized and barbarous. Japan modeled a type of racialized Otherness which confounded the passive East/active West dichotomy which both was the prevailing late Victorian paradigm and remains the prevailing mode of postcolonial critique, and at the same time did not achieve "a mutually equal relationship between the Self and the Other, without reducing the Other to the Self and doing away with either its oppositionality or its connectivity."[27] The Gothic quality of Gothic Japanism arises then from this uneasy sense of a limit to the knowable (assimilable), *without* a grammar capable of accommodating this absolute difference—or, more precisely, the Gothic attempts to provide this grammar, paradoxically, by performing its absence.

Thus Grace Lavery, in *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan*, calls Japan "an Other Empire radically threatening the cultural chauvinism of late-Victorian Britain," in an aesthetic if not a macrohistorical sense.[28] I take inspiration from Lavery's methods of analysis and in particular her navigation between minor and major histories (that is, microhistories and macrohistories) in the methodology she terms "quaint historiography."[29] I am, however,

25 Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 227, 230.

26 Despite its limited uptake within Gothic studies, there has been a general uptick of literature on nineteenth-century (and beyond) Western ideas of East Asia in recent years. These studies tend to focus primarily on China, but are nevertheless helpful insofar as they advance a more general theory of "yellowness" or "Asianness." See for example: Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019); Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain, Modernist Literature & Culture* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010).
The significant exception to the exclusion of East Asia from Gothic literary studies is the "Yellow Peril" idea, which appears sporadically in work on race and the Gothic. See for example: Karen Kingsbury, "Yellow Peril, Dark Hero: Fu Manchu and the "Gothic Bedevilment" of Racist Intent," in Anolik and Howard, eds. *The Gothic Other*; "Yellow Peril Fictions," in Ailise Bulfin, *Gothic Invasions: Imperialism, War and Fin-de-Siècle Popular Fiction, Gothic Literary Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018).

27 Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 14.

28 Grace E. Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 16, 30. Briefly, Lavery argues that the "quaint" and the "exquisite" were the two minor aesthetic categories through which Japan was understood in the Victorian imagination, and conversely, that the history of Japanese modernization structured these aesthetic categories. Lavery defines the "quaint" as an aesthetic category referring to "an oblique, slippery relation to history, a distinctive mode of passing into the past," and finally an "irretrievability" by history—that is, the "quaint" object is one of harmless irrelevance. She defines "the exquisite" as "the point at which converge an insuperable beauty and an irresistible violence"—the "exquisite" object is uncomfortably, even painfully beautiful. beautiful.

29 Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, xi-xii. Lavery gives the following definition of "minor" history: "I mean this term, quite conventionally, to describe literary and cultural texts, individuals, and movements of less importance—causing
fewer secondary phenomena; affecting fewer people or historical events; being generally less influential or just less good—than major texts, individuals, and movements" (31). Lavery's "quaint

somewhat less interested than Lavery in aesthetics qua aesthetics and more interested in aesthetics insofar as they structure the cultural-political project of understanding Japan—I ask not what Japan can do for the Gothic, but what the Gothic can do for Japan.

Lavery's narrow focus on aesthetics—the "minor" histories of operettas and bad poetry—rests on a broader assumption about the positioning of Japan vis-à-vis the "major" history of British imperialism. This assumption is, in brief, that Japan was merely "eccentric." Supporting this paradigm, Toshio Yokoyama points out that the key term for Japan in British periodical literature of the 1850s-80s was "singular."[30] The assumption that Japan could be—and was—contained neatly by the label "singular" or "eccentric" is partially, I think, why there has been so little scholarship on the British (literary) idea of Japan.[31] My argument will attempt to show that the marginalization of Japan as "singular" or "eccentric" was in fact a less-than-successful tactic for containing and dismissing Japanese strangeness and the profound anxiety it provoked. It is also worth noting that the history of Meiji modernization, militarization, and imperialism is far from "minor" in terms not only of Japanese history, but of the history of greater East Asia, global capitalism, and the production of race (and racial supremacy). And though it remains true that the study of Orientalism tends to reveal much more about the Orientalist than the Oriental, Japan was also particularly eager to participate in its own Orientalization and the production of the modern idea of Japan, leaving open the question of the applicability of Gothic Japanism to works by Japanese authors.[32]

When I speak of "the idea of Japan," I mean that the "Japanese" is not a self-evident characteristic of particular phenomena but a way to classify a dynamic but finite set of objects, people, places, images, and ideas. And as "Gothic" is one available category within the organizing structure of genre, "Japanese" is one available category within the overlapping organizing structures of race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and style. "Japanese" refers, of course, to a real people, a real place, real art objects, etc. (as the Gothic genre tends to refer to real historical periods, technologies, physical structures such as castles, etc.), but in the process of incorporating these real referents into the category they are endowed with an *excess* of meaning—the thing itself is indistinguishable from the idea of the thing. For example, to name a "Japanese sword" is not merely to indicate a sword made in Japan but to suggest that it is a thing of great craftsmanship, mystique, and an erotic thingness: a sword embedded into a certain history of art and violence, a certain economy of production and circulation, which is ultimately inseparable from our conception of other *things Japanese* (kimonos, samurai, tea ceremonies, kabuki plays) insofar as all are infused with the nebulous but powerful force of *Japaneseness*.

It is the word which does the work; language which binds together indiscriminately the real and

historiography" accepts the minorness of the historical objects and events she narrates, which sometimes "feel orthogonal to or even remote from the historical metanarratives that occupied the same space and time as the stories I relate here" (xii). Nevertheless, she does gesture towards major histories through these minor ones. If I am not entirely committed to Lavery's methodology, I take her "quaint historiography" as permission to linger at times in spaces and moments which may seem trivial and/or "merely" literary.

30 Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation 1850-80*, St. Antony's/Macmillan Series (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987).

31 By contrast, there has been a great deal of scholarship on American ideas of Japan in literature and popular media, as well as a variety of work on the taste for Japonisme in British fine and decorative art. On American ideas of Japan, see John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); William R. Nester, *Power across the Pacific: A Diplomatic History of American Relations with Japan* (Washington Square, N.Y: New York University Press, 1996); Jon Thares Davidann, *Cultural Diplomacy in U.S.-Japanese Relations, 1919-1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Unsurprisingly, most of the literature is concentrated around the Asia-Pacific War. On Japonisme in British visual art, see Toshio Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme*, Swiss Asian Studies, Research Studies, vol. 10 (Bern; New York: P. Lang, 1991) and Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel, and Nineteenth-Century Japan* (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). There have also been a handful of studies on particular British writers working in Japan, and a significant body of work on Hearn which dwarfs the historiography of all the others combined.

32 A much longer version of this project (and one requiring of me a much better grasp of the Japanese language) might look at Japanese-language and Japanese-penned texts to examine further the complicated collaborations, (mis)translations, and critical dialogues between the late-Victorian British and the Meiji Japanese in the production of the idea(s) of Japan.

the unreal, the tangible and intangible, in a network, tenuous and resilient as a spiderweb, of meaning and reference. It is because of the immense complexity and particularity of language that I am only able here to speak of the "Japanese" as a linguistic signifier in English and not the equally interesting (semi-) equivalents in Japanese.[33] And in part the complexity and particularity of language is itself begotten by the particular relationship of a language's speakers to geography, political power, and the global flow of goods and ideas.[34] That I take language and aesthetics to be so tied up in material relations has the additional effect that I must limit my analysis to British writers, to the exclusion of Americans; the material and ideological situations of Britain and the United States at the end of the nineteenth century were simply too different to treat both satisfactorily within the bounds of this project.[35] By "Japanism" or "the idea of Japan," then, I mean to denote a basically Anglo system of knowledge on Japan which arises from the material positioning of British interlocutors in relation to Japanese natives, and which imagines a Japaneseness both subsuming and exceeding the "real" Japan.[36]

I. The Spirit of Old Japan (The Ghost)

Following the Meiji Revolution, it quickly became a commonplace among foreigners and Japanese alike to refer to an "Old Japan" and a "New Japan." Gone the Japan of shogun, of samurai, "of isolation... the Old Japan of picturesque feudalism, of *harakiri*, of a society ranged in castes and officered by spies and censors, the Old Japan of an ever-increasing skill in lacquer and porcelain, of aristocratic punctilio, of supremely exquisite taste."[37] Enter the Japan of the emperor and his bureaucrats, smart Western-style suits, free trade, foreign capital, railroads, warships, public education, German science, and utilitarian philosophy, where "the Japanese boast that they have done in thirty or forty years what it took Europe half as many centuries to accomplish."[38] A pleasingly neat, and characteristically Victorian, historiography: the long arc of history towards Western modernity, towards liberal democracy and global industrial capitalism, towards a perfected civilization despite the loss of some savage grandeur, something primitive and picturesque.

But if the liberal-imperial (or Whig) project of history was, fundamentally, "a way of 'doing' history, which relentlessly attempts to align or educate the regnant forms of the unfamiliar with its own expectations," the case of Japan was not so easily assimilated into a preconceived rationalist history which plotted human societies along an expected course of linear development.[39] In the first place, the Old Japan was no land of savages waiting to be civilized, but *already* "a great empire with a most ancient and elaborate civilisation," an urbanized and relatively peaceful people whose capacity for aesthetic production surpassed even the finest European artisans.[40] In the second, even the rapid and apparently complete changes in Japanese society were contested; Hearn in fact argued that "the land remains what it was before; its face has scarcely been modified by all the changes of Meiji."[41] Japan thus stood in uneasy—and, I will argue, Gothic—relation to the Western project of historical time.

Perhaps the single most iconic figure of the

33 Which might include *nihon-fuu* (日本風) or *nihon-shiki* (日本式), both meaning roughly "Japanese style," or *wa* (和), a noun which is attached to other nouns to indicate their Japaneseness (*washi* 和紙 for example meaning Japanese paper).

34 Here (and throughout) I am, of course, much indebted to Edward Said's groundbreaking work on knowledge, literature, and geopolitical power in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) and Culture and Imperialism (New York: Knopf, 1993).

35 Lafcadio Hearn is, admittedly, an edge case in terms of Britishness: Hearn was born in Greece, raised in Dublin, educated in England and France, and spent a decade in the United States and West Indies before moving to Japan. Throughout his life, however, he carried British identification papers.

36 Though sometimes used as the English version of the French "Japonisme"—an art historical term which refers specifically to the late-19th century Western European fad for Japanese art and design—I use "Japanism" here in the distinct if not unrelated sense of the body of knowledge and representation of Japan by British writers, with the suffix signaling reference to but not synonymy with "Orientalism," in Said's sense.

37 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 235.

38 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 1.

39 Uday Singh Mehta on J.S. Mill in Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 18.

40 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* in Japan, 47.

41 Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1896), 14.

Gothic literary form, the ghost (or spirit) is also the figure of the Gothic relation to history. The ghost disrupts the linearity of time, asserts within the obvious realness of the present the nonobvious realness of the past. The ghost is the historical subject unbound from the progression of history: the fantasy of pure past-ness, the past unto itself. It does not obey the ascendency of the *now* over the *then* (that is, the linear flow of time from past to present) it merely insists, unrelentingly, on its own desires, its own sense of injustice—its own subjecthood. The ghost suggests that the dead are as real as we are. Or is it that we are as unreal as they? As Jerrold E. Hogle puts it, the Gothic embodies "the terror or possible horror that the ruination of older powers will haunt us all, not just with our desires for them, but with the fact that what 'grounds' them, and now their usurpers, is really a deathly chaos."[42] A ghostly history (a Gothic history) undermines the linear organizing principle of Whig historiography, the happy chauvinism of the modern and the rational; it is, instead, a history of recurrence, of failed repression, of lingering ambivalence.

Meiji Japan—in British eyes—was populated by ghosts both literal and metaphorical. Both types of ghost threatened the supremacy of Western historical time: the first in its ability to cast doubt on the modern primacy of the rational, the second in its suggestion that a Japanese organization of temporality (a "history" in an imprecise sense) might constitute a legitimate alternative to Western history ("history" as such)—thus compromising, definitionally, its claims to universality. In the attempt to assimilate Japanese realities into Western historiographical theory, the "Old Japan" (both populated by ghosts and itself ghostly) ran up against and "haunted" the "New Japan"—and, indeed, the whole project of modernity.

Seeing Ghosts: Fact, Fiction, Realms of Possibility

An 1885 article in *The Magazine of Art* entitled "Some Japanese Bogies" claims that "our ghosts are to the spectres of Japan as moonlight is to sunlight, or as water unto whiskey."[43] There is a long Japanese tradition of supernatural beings, and almost as long a tradition in Anglophone writings on Japan of (over) representing the power and omnipresence of the Japanese ghost. The Japanese ghost was understood broadly in Victorian popular writings as belonging to a particularly Japanese (though sometimes explained as Chinese or more broadly East Asian in origin) systematic of life and death in which ghosts proliferated irrespective of the boundaries between the living and the dead, the human and the non-human, or the self and the non-self. They did not restrict themselves to typically Gothic locales, or even to the human form: "These Oriental bogies do not appear in the dark alone, or only in haunted houses, or a crossroads, or in gloomy woods," the article goes on. "They are everywhere: every man has his own ghost, every place has its peculiar haunting fiend, every natural phenomenon has its informing spirit..."[44]

Victorian folklorists and anthropologists, of course, collected such ghost stories from any number of cultures—the primitive and strange as well as their own. What sets the Japanese ghost apart is its believability. It teeters on the edge of reality: between the *maybe* and the *probably not*. Mitford, Bird, Hearn, and Chamberlain all comment upon the seemingly

42 Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction," in Jerrold E. Hogle, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. The ghost is the most relevant here, but many Gothic monsters are monsters of history. Victor Frankenstein's torment at the hands of his creation is the torment of his own history. Howard L. Malchow reads Frankenstein's monster as an allegory of Atlantic slavery, dramatizing the supposed ambiguity between inherent inferiority and miseducation. Leaving aside the question of the biological flaw, this means that *Frankenstein* may be read, at least in part, as an allegory of historical culpability on both a personal (microhistorical) and world systems (macrohistorical) level. Dracula (and the vampire in general) is a historical monster in a slightly different sense: "The blood is the life!" intones the mad Renfield, and indeed *Dracula* is a novel obsessed with the bloodline and all it entails. The more immediate history of family inheritance (perverted by Dracula in his blood-exchanges) quickly becomes indistinguishable from race-history, and the count has a habit of waxing poetic about the once-greatness of his race. He is a horrific anachronism of a darker and bloodthirstier time, when the "war-like fury" of the Huns "swept the earth like a living flame, till the dying peoples held that in their veins ran the blood of those old witches, who, expelled from Scythia, had mated with the devils in the desert." Both of these quintessential Gothic novels, then, take up the problem of the irrepressibility of history at multiple levels—personal history, family history, world history—which are anyways not distinct historiographical phenomena so much as differences in resolution.

43 A. Lang, "Some Japanese Bogies," *The Magazine of Art* v. 8, Jan. 1885, 15.

44 Lang, "Some Japanese Bogies," 18.

universal belief in ghosts among Japanese people—if such believers are mostly, they are not always, mere superstitious peasants. Mitford recounts a night spent among Japanese friends who each have their own "weird tales," "for the truth of which the narrators vouched with utmost confidence."[45] Mitford is not forthcoming about his own belief or disbelief, but notes of one tale that it "was told by a professor in the college at Yedo," who "stated it to be well authenticated, and one of general notoriety."[46] These ghost stories are presented, moreover, alongside Mitford's version of an old and popular Japanese folktale (Mitford's title is "The Ghost of Sakura"), which he accompanies with meticulous footnoted citations *as though the events in the story constituted "historical fact."* His first footnote reads: "The story, which also forms the subject of a play, is published, but with altered names, in order that offence may not be given to the Hotta family. The real names are preserved here. The events related took place during the rule of the Shogun Iyémitsu, in the first half of the seventeenth century."[47] Unusual too for a "mere" folktale, the story contains a translation of (supposedly) the exact text of a petition presented by the titular Sakura to the shogun.[48]

In general, Mitford makes surprisingly little effort to distinguish formally or rhetorically between the fictional and the factual in his *Tales*. The first six stories he relates, which comprise the bulk of the text, are explicitly *not* identified as "folktales" or "fairytales"—they are simply "tales." In his introduction, he writes that "there is not an incident narrated in the following pages, however strange it may appear to Europeans, *for the possibility and probability of which those most competent to judge will not vouch*."[49] It was (is) a mainstay of the narrative of modernity that magic had disappeared from the world; to the educated and rational Englishman, who had no time for specters and superstitions, a ghost could be explained away (rationally) as a trick of the light, a psychological effect, in some way or other a mere appearance and not reality. But the utter foreignness of Japan (the Old Japan in particular) opened a gap in reality—a small window of possibility—such that *if ghosts were to exist, it would be in Japan*.[50] *Tales of Old Japan*, in its odd patchwork of heard stories, historical tidbits, personal narratives, and political asides, arranges the fantastical and the nonfictional in such close company that they become difficult to distinguish.

Even Bird, a staunch Protestant and the very picture of a no-nonsense bourgeois Englishwoman, admitted to feeling at times the primeval stir of the supernatural. She recalls that, during her visit to the Shrine at Ise (one of the holiest in Shinto), "I involuntarily quickened my pace, for I felt as if the ghosts of the dead ages were after me!"[51] In another passage—perhaps the most Gothic of her lengthy travelogue—she describes her meeting at a Shin Buddhist temple with a priest who attempted to explain Buddhist doctrine to her:

> I felt as if I were far from the haunts of living men. It was not this alone, but I was entangled in a web of metaphysics, or lost in chaos where nothing had form, and birth and death succeeded each other through endless eternities, life with misery for its essence, death only the portal to re-birth into new misery, and so on in interminable cycles of unsatisfying change, till at last righteousness triumphs, and the soul being born into misery no more, reaches its final goal in practical annihilation.[52]

45 Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, 224.

46 Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, 226.

47 Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, 197.

48 Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, 223.

49 Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, vi. Emphasis mine. Note too the similarity between this prefatory remark and the conceit of many Gothic novels, which adopt the form of factual records (usually collections of letters, newspaper articles, etc). This difference is, of course, that the reader knows quite unambiguously that *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* are fictions.

50 This is, I think, still at least partially true. Social media pages, made-for-streaming documentaries, and internet horror forums abound with supernatural stories which are said to have taken place in Japan. Notably too, the "haunted suicide forest" of Aokigahara furnishes Western journalists, influencers, and thrill-seeking tourists with endless opportunities for a brush with the ghostly.

51 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* in Japan, 289.

52 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* in Japan, 249-50. It is no coincidence that Bird's brush with the supernatural occurred at a religious site, as Japanese religiosity itself was often experienced by Westerners as inherently Gothic. Though most Europeans visiting Japan at the turn of the century took "religion" to be a natural and self-evident category, the variety of Japanese belief

> Bird's account accords quite well with Michael Blouin's reading of Hearn, who, he says, "appropriates bits and pieces of Japanese culture to create for his readers a pseudo-Buddhist void, an unstoppable accumulation of ancestors pushing living beings—without their consent—into the future...As a result, the reader faces modernity with a vanishing certainty over whether or not a larger force truly guides the way."[53] In either case, the regnant image is that of the void: objects appropriated endlessly into meaninglessness, drawn towards annihilation. The organizing principle of temporality is, precisely, disorganization. Here, in Japanese Buddhism (or at least in a British interpretation of Japanese Buddhism), resides the very "deathly chaos" which Hogle identifies as belonging to Gothic nightmares of history.

To register this temporal chaos is one thing, but this moment in *Unbeaten Tracks* exceeds ethnographic (dis)interest. That Bird casts Japanese Buddhism in Gothic terms has less to do with the nature of the doctrine itself than with the affective state that the encounter with Buddhism produces in *her*: "lost," "entangled," beyond the realm of ordinary life. Though she returns soon enough to the epistemological solid ground of her English sensibilities, she has experienced, for a moment, the awful vertigo of the foreign. Removed from "the haunts of living men," she has touched the Japanese—that is, the dead—and found herself face-to-face with an alternative eschatology, which she felt, for a moment, *might* be true. The Gothic mode here captures not only the disordered nature of Japanese "metaphysics" as she experiences it, but the Gothic nature of the experience itself. It is, after all, only a feeling—a passing sense of the irrational and otherworldly, without explanation or evidence, like the chilling and purely subjective feeling that one is in the presence of a ghost.

The Ghost of a Race

Another specter, less literal if no less real, haunted the land of the rising sun: the "Spirit of Old Japan." This restless revenant pervaded late-Victorian writings on Japan, popular and scholarly alike. In his preface to *Tales of Old Japan*, for example, Mitford writes that:

> The feudal system has passed away like a dissolving view before the eyes of those who have lived in Japan during the last few years. But when they arrived there it was in full force... Nor, as many a recent event can prove, have heroism, chivalry, and devotion gone out of the land altogether. We may deplore and inveigh against the Yamato Damashi, or Spirit of Old Japan, which still breathes in the soul of the Samurai, but we cannot withhold our admiration from the self-sacrifices which men will still make for the love of their country.[54]

As Mitford suggests, the "Spirit of Old Japan" is a loose English translation of the Japanese *yamato damashii* (大和魂). The term *yamato* (大和) came in the nineteenth century to signify the Japanese "race"—Japanese-speaking inhabitants of the main islands who trace their origins to prehistoric migration from the continent, as opposed to non-"essentially" Japanese (that is, marginalized) groups like the Ainu, Okinawans, and Koreans. The word *tamashii* (魂) means something like "soul" or "life force," and can also, in particular contexts, mean something like "spirit" or "ghost."[55] Thus, the phrase *yamato damashii* refers to the imagined essence of this semi-mythical Japanese race, a kind of folkloric nationalism which is discursively implicated with Japanese chauvinism, imperialism, and eugenics.

The English "spirit," like the Japanese *tamashii*, takes on a double meaning: both an essence or life force and the interminability of that essence or life force—a specter, an apparition, a ghost. The invocation of the

and practice (including various forms of Buddhism, strains of Confucianism, a rapidly-politicizing Shintō, and endless forms of folk spirituality) often confounded even the most self-assured Western observers. "Religion" is, in fact, a difficult category in the case of Japan and, in the period we are concerned with, was only beginning to be internalized and articulated (as shūkyō 宗教) by the Japanese themselves.

53 Blouin, *Japan and the Cosmopolitan Gothic*, 40.

54 Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan*, vi-vii.

55 When two nouns are combined in Japanese, an unvoiced consonant at the beginning of the second noun may become voiced; thus 魂 may be pronounced *tamashii* or *damashii*.

spirit insists on the irrepressibility of the Old within the New without denying that there has been a death; with a properly Gothic disregard for the comfort of categories, the Spirit of Old Japan traverses the boundaries between life and death with impunity. The "heroism, chivalry, and devotion"—terms, not coincidentally, associated with the Western European Middle Ages—of the Old Japan persist in the New, despite the apparent dissolution of that "strange" world. If the Gothic threatens a history rooted in "a deathly chaos," the Spirit comprises just this type of Gothic history: an unstable movement through and across time which resists the comforting teleology of the march-towards-modernity model of history. The modern Japan cannot throw off its ghosts, try as it might: "[The Japanese]," wrote renowned Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain, "want to be somebody else and something else than what they have been and *still partly are*."[56]

Chamberlain's comment points us as well to the racial nature of the "Spirit of Old Japan" concept. If the ghost indicates a chaotic kind of temporal organization in which that which is dead is never really buried but constantly returns to haunt the present, it thereby privileges the stability *across time* of a particular type of ghostly subject, which maintains its essential "spirit" no matter the historical situation in which it appears. That is, the ghostly nature of Japaneseness also makes possible its continuity (the essential "spirit" of Japan). Hearn is even more explicit about the essential function of the ghost in constructing a Japanese race; "the strength of Japan," he writes, "like the strength of her ancient faith, needs little material display: both exist where the deepest real power of any great people exists,— in the Race Ghost."[57] The "Race Ghost"—eternal, irrepressible, recurring—is a guarantor of the racial character of the Japanese insofar as it is its own ghost (we are always *what we have been*). It is both the haunter and the haunted; both dead and alive; both a remnant of the medieval past and a fundamental component of modernity.

The nineteenth-century idea of a particular racial "spirit" was applied, of course, far from exclusively to Japan. Hearn's formulation of the Japanese "Race Ghost" ultimately moves us beyond Japan and towards the ghostly nature of the ideology of race itself. The unique case of Meiji Japan staged a larger problem in the construction of race alongside modernity: If the New Japan was indeed so entirely transmogrified from the Old Japan, how was it possible to say that there was such a thing as "Japan" or the "Japanese" at all? That is: if the progression towards modernity demanded constant transformation, constant substitution of new forms for old, wherein lay the continuity of the "people" or "nation" such that one could understand a particular "race" as a coherent, transhistorical whole?

In order to uphold a Whig historiography, the "Race Ghost" concept must undermine it, therefore exposing its internal contradictions. Such ideas as the "Spirit of Old Japan" and the "Race Ghost" resolve the tension we have identified by pushing it into the realm of the supernatural: beyond the dominion of the tangible and the historical—the material things which come and go, the bodies which live and die—there hangs an intangible racial essence, which at the same time pervades (even animates) the material. But in doing so, the supernatural is made real—it must be, if it is to prop up the real phenomenon of race—thereby undermining the epistemology of modernity which relied in the first place on the *denial* of the reality of the supernatural. That this paradox appeared in meditations on Japan is consonant with the Gothic status of Japan as a semi-fictional land capable of sustaining (even relying on) such paradoxes.

Hauntings and History

As I have suggested, though, mere "eccentricity" never seemed large enough a category to contain Japan. When the fictional so intrudes on the real, fictionality is no longer synonymous with harmlessness, and Japanese ghosts, literal and metaphorical, carried—as most ghosts do—the connotation of threat. The Spirit of Old Japan was, for Mitford, both the object of grudging admiration (for, it must be noted, its militant nationalist connotations) *and* something to "deplore," against which to "inveigh."[58] Mitford's discomfort in the face of the Spirit registered an uneasy sense that such a force did not belong in the modern world; at

56 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 3. Emphasis mine.

57 Hearn, *Kokoro*, 15. Possibly Hearn's rendering of the German "Volksgeist" ("folk spirit" or "national spirit").

58 See block quote which begins the previous section.

the same time, an understanding that this very force produced and sustained Japanese modernity.

The Spirit of Old Japan haunted Western modernity with its insistence on the preservation of another temporality, another kind of life. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that: "A historical construction of temporality (medieval/modern, separated by historical time)... is precisely the axis along which the colonial subject splits itself. Or to put it differently, this split is what is history; writing history is performing this split over and over again."[59] The Spirit of Old Japan is the ghost which arises from this splitting; the Japanese (non-European if not really "colonial") subject experiences a doubled consciousness, as both itself and its own ghost. Put differently, the "Race Ghost" or the "Spirit of Old Japan" which "still breathes in the soul of the samurai," removes a piece of the samurai from himself, designating it medieval while the man himself becomes modern.

But he is (literally, for the time being; later only imaginatively) still samurai, and if the Spirit of Old Japan arises from the division of Japaneseness along the axis of Western history, it also dramatizes the *failure* of European "universal" history to appropriate Japanese histories.[60] Chakrabarty writes as well of sites of struggle, of alternative temporalities, of Indian "histories" which "themselves bespeak an antihistorical consciousness; that is, they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history." In the same way, indigenous Japanese "histories" are, when measured against the European concept of history as a *natural* and *theorizable* progression from primitivism to modernity, strictly *antihistorical*.[61] As Chamberlain notes, the oldest and foundational Japanese historical records, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi* (or *Nihon shoki*), are also accounts of gods, demons, and supernatural happenings: "it is absolutely impossible to separate [Japanese history and mythology]," he says. "Why, indeed, attempt to do so, where both are equally fabulous?"[62] This Japanese myth-history constitutes an alternative (Japanese) temporality which—basically—grounds Japanese time in a continuous line of ascendancy from a divine source. Structurally similar to pre-Enlightenment histories which looked on contemporary society as a degradation of—rather than an improvement on—a lost, ideal age, this Japanese temporality would seem diametrically opposed to modernity as such.

But the Japanese myth-history also begins precisely where the history of Japanese modernity does: with the ascension of the Emperor. As the most constant figure in Japanese history (upheld in Japanese nationalism as the "spirit" of the Japanese nation), a semi-divine figure in an unbroken line descended from the the gods (a "spirit," invested with unearthly power), the emperor is both the remnant of a despotic Oriental past *and* the driver of the Meiji modernizing project. "New Japan could never have risen and expanded as she has done without some ideal to beckon her onwards," Chamberlain proclaims, "and this Imperialistic ideal was the only one within reach. It has been the lever that has raised her from Oriental impotence to her present rank among the great powers of the world."[63]

Victorian historical narratives of the emergence of Western modernity insisted that old customs must be thrown off, medieval despotisms done away with, that reason must triumph over superstition. But for Japan, the old customs, despotisms, superstition—the (avowed) belief in the divine right of the emperor, the heavenly origins of the Japanese people—were the very force by which the nation was propelled into enthusiastic adoption of Western-originated, "modern," and "rational" science, philosophy, industry, militarization, and accompanying forms of capitalist expansion and imperial domination. The "Spirit" remains so powerfully present for Japan (as it does not for other non-European subjects appropriated into history) because the modern Japanese subject was understood to be already present in Japanese

59 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?", *Representations*, No. 37, Winter 1992, 13.

60 Through the Second World War it remained common for both Westerners and Japanese to explain Japanese military prowess as a product of *bushidō* (the samurai code, which is in fact largely a product of contemporary projections); even now Japanese businessmen are sometimes called (and call themselves) samurai.

61 Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," 10-11.

62 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 203.

63 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 411.

medievalism; the movement towards modernity being not so much a birth as a resurrection.

To be a ghost means to have been a person, once, and perhaps to be a person still; only to have undergone a change in form. For Hearn, Japanese "Occidentalization" is a kind of "death," but it is *at the same time* only a "rearrangement of a part of the pre-existing machinery of thought."[64] Another kind of modernity seemed to be emerging in Japan, one that did not require a true disappearance of the supernatural/irrational/occult elements of the "Old Japan" but only a kind of recasting (a reincarnation, if you will). The Spirit of Old Japan, as a conceptual ghost, brought with it into Japanese modernity the literal ghosts of Old Japan, sewing Gothic seeds of doubt, discomfiting the modern, rational observer. "I reflected that were any evil to befall me out there in the night," Hearn wrote of his experience of the O-bon (the Japanese festival of the dead), "—meddling, or seeming to meddle, with the lights of the Dead,—I should myself furnish the subject of some future weird legend..."[65] His musing captures the doubled anxiety I have tried to illuminate here: both that Japan contains real ghosts (that there really is some evil out there, lurking in the night) and that the ghostly narrative mode of Japanese "history" (the "weird legend") will claim him as its subject, remove him from the real and assimilate him finally into its bizarre fictions.

II. Japan, My Reflection (The Doppelgänger)

In his "Ode to Japan," appearing in *Macmillan's* in 1902, English essayist and poet Arthur Christopher Benson wrote:

Clasp hands across the world,
Across the dim sea-line,
Where with bright flags unfurled
Our navies breast the brine;
Be this our plighted union blest,
Oh ocean-thronèd empires of the East and West!
...
Here, from this English lawn
Ringed round with ancient trees,
My spirit seeks the dawn
Across the Orient seas.
While dark the lengthening shadows grow,
I paint the land unknown, which yet in dreams I know.[66]

Benson's was a particularly optimistic take on a familiar theme: the imagined affinity (even a kind of primordial, psychic link, as Benson hints at) between England and Japan. Sometimes, as in Benson's "Ode," this affinity was framed triumphantly, as a productive international partnership and even a fulfillment of an Enlightenment utopic vision of East-West syncretization.[67] Sometimes, as Yokoyama points out, the theme of Japan's "singularity" carried a paternalistic tone, such that Britain could position itself as "a uniquely refined nation which alone could cope successfully with the 'strange' nation in the Far East."[68] This imagined relationship of affinity, though, meant that Japan was not only a site onto which Britain could project its chauvinistic fantasies but also the imperial anxieties which bubbled to the surface at the end of the century. As Yokoyama puts it: "In [British writers'] romanticisation of Old Japan, one finds a strong tinge of antipathy towards modernity. Indeed, their love of Old Japan was counterbalanced by their hatred of New Japan, which was, in their eyes, not at all Japan but industrialised Britain or, in more general terms, modern European civilisation itself."[69]

In the Old Japan, British writers saw something like their own Middle Ages, and in the New Japan, their own transition to modernity. "To have lived through the transition stage of modern Japan," wrote Chamberlain, "makes a man feel preternaturally old; for here he is in modern times, with the air full of talk about bicycles and bacilli and 'spheres of influence,' and yet he can himself distinctly remember the Middle Ages."[70] Chamberlain's choice of the word "preternatural" belies the uneasiness in this recognition—which was to some extent only the fulfillment of the universalizing directive of Chakrabarty's "artifice of history." But as

64 Hearn, *Kokoro*, 10.

65 Hearn, *In Ghostly Japan* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1899), 233.

66 Arthur Christopher Benson, "Ode to Japan," *Macmillan's Magazine* v.85, 1901-1902, 439.

67 See Blouin, *Japan and the Cosmopolitan Gothic*, 13-14.

68 Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, 16.

69 Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, 162.

70 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 1.

Meiji Japanese development produced a modernity haunted by the Spirit of Old Japan, this problematic Japanese modernity in turn "haunted" the British observer.

As officials, aristocrats, artists, and intellectuals of the New Japan enthusiastically adopted British (and other Western) legal systems, philosophy, industry, architecture, consumer goods, and more, British interpreters saw their own image in the mirror, and they did not like what they saw. What should have been a miracle—the transformation in less than half a century of a "backwards" medieval nation into a paragon of Western modernity—was, as instances of the wonderful often are, infused with the terrible. Who after all was the barbarian, to destroy something so beautiful (genuine, mystical, naïve) in order to build something so unlovely (synthetic, rational, canny)? And what kind of people could so easily remake themselves, slip so fluidly into another skin? As Japan began to remake itself in the image of the West, it took on the eerie aspect of the Gothic Doppelgänger, something artificial and half-alive, the double or living specter of the British imperial Self.

As Above, So Below: On Orientalism and Japan as the Mirror-Self

The idea of Japan as not merely another Oriental nation but a kind of distant mirror-self, an "Other Empire" in the Far East, has intellectual roots far predating the Meiji Revolution, and it is worth examining for a moment those roots in relation to Western knowledge-production on Japan. In his landmark study *Orientalism*, Edward Said characterizes the relationship between the "Occident" and the "Orient" as one of epistemic domination, wherein:

> the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged... according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.[71]

In many ways, the "idea of Japan" accords with Said's framework of Orientalism (and to some extent is simply a subsection of Orientalism). Like other Oriental nations, Japan was treated as a static thing, already known before it was encountered (this point is illustrated almost too perfectly by the fact that Engelbert Kaempfer's seventeenth-century *History of Japan* continued to be treated as an authoritative text through the end of the nineteenth century).[72] And like other Orientalisms, knowledge about Japan was inflected with Western hopes, fears, and biases that both produced and were produced by real relations of political power.

There is, however, an important difference between knowledge about Japan and Orientalist knowledge broadly: for Said, Orientalism depends on the subjugation and inferiority of the Orientals, where Japan was never quite subjugated and the question of Japanese inferiority was always a thorny one. Unless one counts the persistent but largely unsuccessful Christian missionary activity in Japan, there has never been a serious Western attempt at colonizing Japan, or even a sense that Japanese colonization would be a worthy or achievable goal. Perhaps this is largely because the Japanese market was more appealing to European capitalists than the archipelago's scant natural resources, but at least since Luís Fróis penned *The First European Description of Japan* in 1585, European writings on Japan have also betrayed a deep admiration for the culture, lifestyle, and civilization of Japanese people.[73]

Of course, Japan and Japanese people have been subject to European racism, but this racism has rarely taken the form of that racism which labeled African

71 Said, *Orientalism*, 8.

72 Engelbert Kaempfer and John Gaspar Scheuchzer, trans. *The History of Japan: Giving an Account of the Ancient and Present State and Government of That Empire; of Its Temples, Palaces, Castles and Other Buildings; of Its Metals, Minerals, Trees, Plants, Animals, Birds and Fishes; of the Chronology and Succession of the Emperors, Ecclesiastical and Secular; of the Original Descent, Religions, Customs, and Manufactures of the Natives, and of Their Trade and Commerce with the Dutch and Chinese. Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam* (London: The translator, 1727).

73 Luís Fróis SJ, ed. Daniel T. Reff & Richard Danford, *The First European Description of Japan, 1585: A Critical English-Language Edition of Striking Contrasts in the Customs of Europe and Japan by Luis Frois, S.J.* (London: Routledge, 2014).

and Indigenous peoples "barbaric" and "uncivilized," or even that racism which posed China and South and West Asian peoples as pitiful remnants of once-great civilizations.[74] In the heyday of Orientalism as such—the mid-nineteenth- through early-twentieth-century moment of peak Western imperial domination over Asian territory—Japan was always, vexingly, both Asian *and* civilized—perhaps *too* civilized. Where brute power over Japan *was* occasionally asserted (as in the "opening" of the country by American Commodore Perry in 1853, the British siege of Kagoshima in 1863, and the "unequal treaties" established thereafter), by and large the *will* to imperial power was absent because Japan was understood to be on near-equal footing, civilizationally speaking.

That is, Japan has been marked from the beginning—or at least since Fróis—as the Oriental exception—largely set apart from such tired tropes as those of Oriental barbarism or intellectual deficiency.[75] Though archaic by the *fin de siècle*, Fróis' text is quite revealing of the structure of "Japanism" in at least one important way: subtitled *Striking Contrasts in the Customs of Europe and Japan*, Fróis' work presents information about Japan in a series of *contrasting couplets*. Every piece of information about Japan, from the monumental to the trivial, is made legible to the European reader as a *precisely opposed correlative* to a piece of information about Europe. For example: "We use black for mourning; the Japanese use white."[76] "In accordance with corrupt nature, it is men in Europe who repudiate women; in Japan it is often the woman who repudiates the man."[77]

The style of the distich brought the European and the Japanese into conversation on equal terms, such that *to make a statement about Japan was also to make a statement about Europe*; that is, one could make a statement about Japan in precisely the same language with which one could make a statement about Europe. This shared syntax made Japanese difference legible as organized, (theoretically) rational opposition, rather than Oriental irrationality or perversity.[78] A bemused acknowledgement that another people may be equally reasonable, self-aware, civilized, and yet obey a perfectly opposite organizing logic. Fróis articulated it best himself: "it is difficult to believe that one can find such stark contrasts in customs among [us and] people who are so civilized, have such lively genius, and are as naturally intelligent as these [Japanese]."[79] Perhaps, then, the thing which most distinguishes Japanism from other Orientalisms is the extent to which Japan was understood to constitute what Said calls "the surrogate or underground self," and the remarkable imaginative power of that mirror-self to undermine the supremacy of the Self as such.[80]

The style of the distich was not unique to Fróis, but was, I contend, a structuring style of Japanism, at least through the early twentieth century. In *Things Japanese*, Chamberlain devoted an entry to Japanese "Topsy-Turvydom," filled with oppositions strikingly similar to Fróis': "The colour of mourning is not black, but white."[81] "In Europe, gay bachelors are apt to be captivated by the charms of actresses. In Japan, where there are no actresses to speak of, it is the women who fall in love with fashionable actors."[82] And again, this difference is formulated not as the irrationality of the primitive Other but as a perfectly legible, and yet precisely opposite, civilizational comportment. "It has often been remarked," wrote Chamberlain, "that the Japanese do many things in a way that runs directly counter to European ideas of what is natural and

74 This was true at least until the United States met Japan on terms of war; the extreme racialization and dehumanization practiced on both sides of the Pacific War has been well documented by John W. Dower in *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

75 Luís Fróis SJ, ed. Daniel T. Reff & Richard Danford, *The First European Description of Japan, 1585: A Critical English-Language Edition of Striking Contrasts in the Customs of Europe and Japan by Luis Frois, S.J.* (London: Routledge, 2014).

76 Fróis, *The First European Description of Japan*, 47.

77 Fróis, *The First European Description of Japan*, 68.

78 By this I mean something like what Grace Lavery means when she writes that "An appreciation of Japanese art did not mean mystified genuflection towards the latent creativity of the Other—this was not the kind of condescension that, in Edward Said's influential account of Orientalism, formalized the logic of imperialism for the written word. Rather, Japanese art appeared as a force already manifested, a creativity already cultured: an other, in other words, whose claims to aesthetic universality had already gained priority over the Western self" (4).

79 Fróis, *The First European Description of Japan*, 31.

80 Said, *Orientalism*,

81 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 428.

82 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 429.

proper. To the Japanese themselves our ways appear equally unaccountable."[83]

The Japanese was recognized as Other in a manner completely divergent from the typical Gothic/imperial model of Otherness wherein "the reduced Other is posited as inferior or secondary to the European Self—and utterly knowable in its very negativised unknowability"; the Japanese Other is no mere negation but a positive, organized entity capable of defining the "natural and proper" in its own right, and of turning its own bemused gaze on European conceptions of the "natural and proper."[84] Indeed, it was in Japan that Kipling, famous originator of the "white man's burden," admitted to "feeling for the first time that I was a barbarian, and no true *sahib*."[85] It is in this sense that Japan was understood to constitute "an Other Empire radically threatening the cultural chauvinism of late-Victorian Britain."[86]

"You touch it, and it is not what you thought": Imitation and Grotesquerie

This is not to suggest, however, that the pre-WWII Japan-West relationship constituted some ideal form of cosmopolitanism such that Japan was accepted unproblematically as a civilizational equal (either on terms of partnership or enmity); this was manifestly not the case. Rather, as Japanism was coming into vogue in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the Japanese subject split itself along the axis of history, the specter of Old Japan as a hyper-civilized alter-ego grew in the British imagination even as the Westernizing drive of the New Japan threatened to break down the structure of the distich. For the symmetry of the distich (its mirroring quality) may bring two parties into consideration on mutually legible terms, but it is also sustained by the reversal—the irreducible distance manifested syntactically by Fróis' semicolons. One must be able to say "In Europe..." and "In Japan..." without redundancy. Increasingly, as Tokyo began to build in brick and ex-samurai donned bowler hats, this distance appeared to be on the brink of collapse. And this sense of collapse was accompanied, for British interpreters, by the fear that the rise of Western cultural universality meant also the destruction of Japan's equally good claims to cultural universality, and the creation of a monstrous hybrid in its place; that "instead of Japan converting us, we shall pervert Japan."[87]

Observing the crowds on the streets of Tokyo, Kipling described the Japanese people of 1889 thus:

> Here you saw how Western civilisation had eaten into them. Every tenth man was attired in Europe clothes from hat to boots. It is a queer race. It can parody every type of humanity to be met in a large English town. Fat and prosperous merchant with mutton-chop whiskers; mild-eyed, long-haired professor of science, his clothes baggy about him; schoolboy in Eton jacket, broadcloth trousers... all these and many, many more you shall find in the streets of Tokyo in half an hour's walk. But when you come to speak to the imitation, behold it can only talk Japanese. You touch it, and it is not what you thought.[88]

There is, in the first place, the sense of "Western civilisation" as a corrupting force, "eating into" the Japanese almost as a parasite. But there is an eerie quality to the Japanese themselves as well, the ease with which they imitate, their effortless fluidity of appearance and the final revelation of all as hypocrisy, mere artifice—"it is not what you thought." The Japanese body is racially liminal, dressing English but talking Japanese, performing an unsettlingly accurate "parody" of whiteness while remaining fundamentally Oriental. Anne Anlin Cheng describes the ornamental "supraflesh" of the yellow (Oriental) women, a type of race-making which "relies on a decorative grammar, a phantasmic corporeal syntax that is artificial and layered."[89] But the racial supraflesh of Kipling's Japanese bodies does not accord with the real flesh

83 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 427

84 Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism, and Otherness*, 4.

85 Kipling, under editors' title "1889: Letter One," in Cortazzi & Webb, eds., *Kipling's Japan*, 40.

86 Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 30.

87 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 398.

88 Rudyard Kipling, eds. Hugh Cortazzi and George Webb, *Kipling's Japan: Collected Writings*, Bloomsbury Academic Collections: Japanese History (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), .

89 Cheng, *Ornamentalism*, 5-6.

which it adorns; the body wears two skins, and the seamless slippage between Oriental object and Oriental person is disrupted. If to be Oriental is to be artificial to begin with, that Oriental artifice might just as well fashion a semblance of whiteness.

Like the "abhuman" bodies Kelly Hurley describes in her account of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic fiction, then, Kipling's Japanese are "bodies that occupy the threshold between the two terms of an opposition, like human/beast, male/female, or civilized/primitive, by which cultures are able meaningfully to organize experience."[90] This indeterminacy, the refusal to remain contained within any given ("natural") racial category, is surely a constituent factor in Japan's racial strangeness, but it is significant too that the racial guise Japan adopts is that of whiteness, and in particular of Britishness (whiteness par excellence). Those who were understood as *the precise opposite of "us"* began to approach the *"usness" against which they had been defined*.

In the period of Meiji modernization (Occidentalization), the "topsy-turvy" land in the mirror began to shift from a land of opposites to a land of uncanny familiarity, and the point at which Japan was recognized to be "like us" was also the point at which the idea of Japan acquired much of its unsettling, Gothic quality; that is, the particular potency of Japanese strangeness was premised at least in part on its familiarity. In his foundational essay on the uncanny, Freud notes that the *unheimlich* (roughly, the German equivalent of the "uncanny") overlaps in definition with its opposite, the *heimlich* (the familiar, the homely, but also that which is concealed from view), such that "what is *heimlich*... comes to be *unheimlich*."[91] "The 'uncanny,'" he says, "is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar."[92]

Accordingly, the more familiar Japan came to appear to the British observer, the more it came to be described in terms of a living apparition, something imitative and therefore disturbing. For Bird, Yokohama, the de facto base for European residence in Japan after becoming the first treaty port to open to foreign trade in 1868, was a particular object of repulsion. She bemoaned at great length the ugliness of this "hybrid city," where everything foreign-looking she found offensive, reporting that: "It has *a dead-alive look*. It has irregularity without picturesqueness, and the grey sky, grey sea, grey houses, and grey roofs, look harmoniously dull."[93] In contrast with the lively beauty she found in Japaneseness in general, where she perceived the Japanese to be merely "imitating" English or European customs she accused them of "unmitigated vulgarity," debasement, and perversion.[94] "The Japanese of the treaty ports are contaminated and vulgarised by intercourse with foreigners" she wrote; "those of the interior, so far from being 'savages,' are kindly, gentle, and courteous."[95] This contamination or vulgarization extends even to the physical body of Japanese people, who "look most diminutive in European dress. Each garment is a misfit, and exaggerates the miserable physique, and the national defects of concave chests and bow legs."[96] The act of imitation transforms the very Japanese body into something grotesque, as Mr. Hyde appears all the more malformed for wearing Dr. Jekyll's suits.

The prevailing aesthetic category for describing Japanese imitation was indeed the grotesque, and this not only in matters of appearance. In the section of *Things Japanese* titled "English as She is Japped," where Chamberlain recounts the many strange distortions of the English language he encounters in Japan, he says of the faux-educational pamphlets offered in garbled English to Japanese audiences that "these curiosities of literature are *too grotesque* for at least the European reader to be long angry with them."[97] In an article on the Japanese Constitution (modeled after the Prusso-German Constitution), C.B. Roylance Kent writes:

> The conduct of the politicians of Japan has on some occasions resembled rather *the grotesque gambols of a mimic* than the acts of serious statesmen. Borrowed political institutions, like cloths, are frequently misfits, and an Oriental

90 Hurley, "British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930," in

91 Freud, "The Uncanny," 2-4.

92 Freud, "The Uncanny,"1-2.

93 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 20. Emphasis mine.

94 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 35, 276, 360.

95 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 8.

96 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 27.

97 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 141. Emphasis mine.

> State which parades in the newest fashions of the West runs some risk at least of ridicule. The Japanese have imported so many foreign habits that they have begun to wear an air which is entirely artificial, and which reminds one of the description of Talleyrand as a man who contrived to build a sort of natural character for himself out of a mass of deliberate affectations. In this there is obvious danger.[98]

The paternalistically dismissive tone of Kent's polemic is quite strikingly undercut by the last line; there is, as is so often the case with the "grotesque," a thin line between the harmlessly comic and the threateningly bizarre.

The grotesque, a key feature of the Gothic, evokes the unnatural, the distorted, the out-of-proportion. This presumes, of course, the existence in the first place of a natural, proportional, un-grotesque model, which is transformed so as to become grotesque; the grotesque is, then, a kind of double, a displaced object half-comic and half-awful because of its exaggerated relationship to the given "original" object. The grotesque presumes also, as Kent and Kipling point us to, operations of artifice: unwise and unnatural meddling with organic forms. The archetypical grotesque bodies of Gothic fiction—Frankenstein's creature, Dorian Gray's picture, and Mr. Hyde—are all artificial doubles who torment their originals (and makers) with *their own distorted forms*; just as the "dead-alive" specter of Japanese modernity tormented its British "creators" with the mirror image of their own defects.

The Specter of a Yellow Empire

A chapter in Hearn's *Kokoro* titled "A Conservative" tells the story of a young Japanese man, born a samurai, who lives through the Meiji Revolution, is educated in Western languages and religion, accepts and then rejects Christianity, and travels extensively in Europe before returning to Japan.[99] As the title suggests, this young man of Hearn's imagining is little impressed with the great cities of the Occident; he "wonder[s] why the Western conception of the worth of life differed so little from the Far-Eastern conception of folly and of effeminacy," seeing in England "wealth, forever growing, and the nightmares of squalor forever multiplying in the shadow of it... vast ports gorged with the riches of a hundred lands, mostly plunder," and many other such horrific sights.[100] These experiences lead him to conclude that "[English] civilization signified a perpetual wicked struggle between the simple and the cunning, the feeble and the strong force and craft combining to thrust weakness into a yawning and visible hell. *Never in Japan had there been even the sick dream of such conditions*."[101]

Hearn's story is a complex game of racial substitution: an Irish-Greek writer imagining Western civilization through the eyes of a young Japanese warrior-cum-intellectual. The West watching the East watching the West. It dramatizes the moment of collision between Japan as the canny Other and Japan as the uncanny doubled Self. The Japanese observer, vested with the legitimacy to pass judgment on European society (as, generally, only the European is permitted to pass judgment on less civilized societies), exposes the terrible shortcomings of the Occident while at the same time demonstrating his clear consciousness of, and ability to appropriate, its monstrous power.

In Western civilization he finds only cold intellect, no true moral or emotional sense. He feels suffocated by its crowds, is stunned at its proliferation of criminality and vice, "hated its tremendous and perfectly calculated mechanism; hated its utilitarian stability; hated its conventions, its greed, its blind cruelty, its huge hypocrisy, the foulness of its want and the insolence of its wealth."[102] And yet this hyper-rationalism, which has stripped the white man of his humanity, is also the instrument of his power:

> that Western science whose logic he knew to be irrefutable assured him of the larger and larger expansion of the power of that civilisation, as of an irresistible, inevitable, measureless inundation of world-pain. Japan would have to learn the new forms of action, to master the new forms of thought, or to perish utterly.[103]

98 C.B. Roylance Kent, "The New Japanese Constitution," *Macmillan's Magazine* v. 70 (1894), 428.

99 Hearn, *Kokoro*, 170-209.

100 Hearn, *Kokoro*, 199-200.

101 Hearn, *Kokoro*, 200, 202. Emphasis mine.

102 Hearn, *Kokoro*, 204.

103 Hearn, *Kokoro*, 205.

Japan, in the estimation of this ex-samurai (and, it would seem, Hearn, his creator) has not only the ability but the duty to adopt the monstrous technologies of Western domination, and at the same time to maintain its traditional moral superiority. At the end of the story, the young man returns to Japan (to Yokohama, to be precise), where he has an almost mystical encounter with the Old Japan and the ghosts of his ancestors; he has taken what he can from the Occident, and is content to return home, to the civilization which turns out to have been superior all along.

The anxieties of "A Conservative" are the same degenerationist anxieties so prevalent in *fin-de-siècle* British Gothic fictions: the corrupting effects of industrialization and urbanization, the affliction of biological and moral recidivism, fear of crowds and mass society, and ultimately the threat that British civilization would be its own demise—that the ruling imperial race would undermine itself, weaken from within the metropolis, and finally collapse.[104] In his bleak account of London, Paris, and other (unnamed) great European cities, Hearn rehearses the well-worn *fin-de-siècle* tropes of urban decadence and modern excess, rising poverty and criminality, vanishing religiosity and moral bankruptcy. That he does so through the eyes of an imagined Japanese observer, who took from the West what best suits him before returning to his beloved country, suggests that the logical conclusion of Japan's remarkable capacity for imitation might be its ascendancy as the next great (that is, economically, culturally, and militarily dominant) civilization. The deepest fear of the Doppelgänger is, after all, that the false self may supplant the true self, and/or lead both to destruction.

An article on Japanese colonial activity in Formosa (now Taiwan) appearing in *Macmillan's* in 1903—tellingly titled "The Cloud in the Far East"—states the problem quite baldly: "The innate difference which seemingly distinguishes Japan from the other nations of the East has never been more signally displayed than in her ability to exercise over alien races the same sort of influence as that possessed by the English among the brown populations which they rule."[105] Japan's talent for mimicry extended to its aptitude for imperial domination, an aptitude which distinguished it from other Oriental races and brought it uncomfortably near to the traditional dominion of whiteness. What began with tailored suits may well end with world domination. What was at stake, then, in Meiji modern grotesqueries was not only the imagined purity of the Old Japan, the British fear that "their own country had been producing a mediocre and monotonous civilisation and passing it on to the much finer old civilisation of Japan."[106] It was the sanctity of whiteness itself, the anxiety that "The Japs are out-Europing Europe, / I fear, in their newest Japan!"[107]

III. At the End of the World (The Corpse)

"Old Japan is dead," wrote Chamberlain, "and the only decent thing to do with the corpse is to bury it."[108] By this he perhaps meant only that Japanese modernization was well and truly underway: the shogunate had fallen, the samurai class had been abolished, and the dominant beliefs and forms of life of the Edo period seemed to be fading into antiquity. But the corpse is, too, a remnant—a material trace of a life that once was, a body stopped but not (yet) vanished. The corpse is (in the Western Christian tradition at least) "a body without soul, a non-body, disquieting matter," which has nevertheless not ceased to be a body; it is the final primacy of the body-object over the intangible human subject (the speaking self, the consciousness, the "I").[109] The corpse thus epitomizes the *ascendancy of form over content*. It is here—in the uncomfortable slippage between person and thing, and in the fear that, in the end, the thing is all—that the Gothic image of the corpse aligns with the anxieties engendered by the idea of Japan.

Invariably Japan and the Japanese people have been associated in the Western mind with the production of beauty. But this beauty is also,

104 See Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, Ch. 7: "Crime, Urban Degeneration and National Decadence," 176-221.

105 "The Cloud in the Far East," *Macmillan's Magazine* v.88 (1903), 357.

106 Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, 165.

107 John Todhunter, "Japanese Night," quoted in Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 21.

108 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 8.

109 Julia Kristeva, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, European Perspectives (New York; Columbia University Press, 1982), 109.

invariably, an uncomfortable kind of beauty, never far from Rilke's proclamation that "beauty is nothing / but the beginning of terror, which we can still barely endure."[110] Lavery's "analytic of the exquisite" characterizes the white British subjective experience of Japanese aesthetics as one of beauty tied to a feeling of incompleteness, a lingering pain, the sense that "Japan is elegant, but perhaps excessively so...the price of Japanese supremacy in the aesthetic realm is an indefinite, but persistent, discomfort."[111] Japanese beauty is too beautiful, its perfection disconcerting; to the European eye it often seemed almost inhuman. In fact, a persistent evaluation of Japanese art by Western critics was that it was all style and no substance (in a word, soulless). Chamberlain quotes Sir Rutherford Alcock, whose popular narrative *The Capital of the Tycoon* recounts his stay in Japan as a British diplomat: "There is a mistake somewhere, and the result is that in one of the most beautiful and fertile countries in the whole world the flowers have no scent, the birds no song, and the fruit and vegetables no flavour."[112] The Japanese excelled, it would seem, in the production of a beauty which was somehow only the *semblance of beauty*, a clever imitation which nonetheless lacked the real genius of "our" art or the real pleasures of "our" nature.

Japanese art, in its excessive attention to form, thus took on rather the character of art*ifice*; and, as we have seen, the Japanese capacity for artifice was so formidable as to suggest that they might "out-Europe Europe" by sheer ingenuity of imitation. Pick notes of the discourse of degeneration that "To envisage the loss of 'our world' in this period was almost axiomatically to envisage a primitive 'lost world' or a degenerative 'after world', the vision caught up in the fantasies of evolution, paleontology and racial anthropology."[113] The vision of a Japanese future (built on an imagination of the Japanese present) was, I argue, one of these possible afterworlds. An afterworld where content was swallowed by form, civilization eaten away from within; a cold world built by the careful hands of Oriental artifice, life reduced to the mere semblance of life. The ascendancy of the corpse: body-as-object-as-body.

The Corpse, Form, and Emptiness

"The highest art and some unspeakably low things go together," Bird wrote, "but every Japanese seems born with a singular perception of, and love of beauty or prettiness."[114] She ties the Japanese propensity for the aesthetic to some "unspeakable" moral decay such that the Japanese subjective sensibility mediates between the "high" and the "low," just as the corpse is an object of both intense fascination and utter repulsion.[115] For Bird, the Japanese genius is all surface, with an absence at its heart in the shape of Christianity:

> I think that in many things, *specially in some which lie on the surface*, the Japanese are greatly our superiors, but that in many others they are immeasurably behind us. In living altogether among this courteous, industrious, and civilised people, one comes to forget that one is doing them a gross injustice in comparing their manners and ways with those of a people moulded by many centuries of Christianity.[116]

For Chamberlain as well, Japanese art is merely decorative, absorbed by form and convention; "but they have never succeeded in adequately transferring to canvas 'the human form divine;' they have never made grand historical scenes live again before the eyes of posterity; they have never... drawn men's hearts from

110 Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. & ed. Edward Snow, "The First Elegy," Poetry Society of America, accessed 20 February 2024, re-published from Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. & ed. Edward Snow, *The Poetry of Rilke: Bilingual Edition* (North Point Press, 2009), originally appearing in Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Duino Elegies*.

111 Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 5. To put a point on it (if you'll excuse the pun), one might think of the katana as the exquisite object par excellence. An object rooted ontologically in both beauty and violence, the katana is, as Lavery so neatly formulates it, both the chrysanthemum and the sword.

112 Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon*, qtd in Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 233-4.

113 Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 156.

114 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 255-6.

115 Kristeva: "The two logical strands that run through the biblical text to be joined together at the time of burnt offerings or separated later on, sacrifice and abomination, reveal their true interdependence *at the moment when the corpse topples from being the object of worship over to being the object of abomination*" (110). Emphasis mine.

116 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 362. Emphasis mine.

earth to heaven in an ecstasy of adoration."[117] This is the problem of the corpse and of Japanese beauty: that they represent both an excess (flesh on its own, body for body's sake, an indecent thing) *and* a lack (of the Christian soul, of moral meaning, of that fabled "originality" which apparently animates Western art). Japanese art (only the corpse of art) is all vulgar materialism and none of that universal moral/spiritual truth towards which European art claims to strive.

It is not only that Japanese art is devoid of genuine religious or moral meaning, but that religion and morality have themselves become mere form, dead rituals. "Shintō had no root in itself," Chamberlain declares:

> being a thing too empty and jejune to influence the hearts of men... The whole thing is now a mere shadow, though Shintō is still in so far the official cult that certain temples are maintained out of public moneys, and that the attendance of certain officials is required from time to time at ceremonies of a half-religious half-courtly nature.[118]

Bird's evaluation is no kinder: she sees in Shintō only "an Imperial throne funded on an exploded religious fiction, a State religion receiving an outward homage from those who ridicule it, scepticism rampant among the educated classes, and an ignorant priesthood lording it over the lower classes..."[119] Japanese religion is *irreligious*: without belief, hypocritically preoccupied with appearances and reduced to merely a question of *form* (never mind that precisely the same criticism could be—and was—leveled at various forms of Christianity). Every aspect of Japanese life—philosophy and politics, literature and architecture, tea ceremonies and government procedures—could be (and was) subject to the same critique. Of the Tokugawa elite, those ultra-aesthetes of Old Japan, Chamberlain wrote: "The whole life in fact was swathed in formalism, like a mummy in its grave-clothes."[120]

The question of form was, of course, also the preoccupying question of Aestheticism and its detractors, and Japan often found itself at the center of this debate. Lavery's chapter on the intersection of Aestheticism, the Japanese, and the queer around questions of form and labor is titled "All Margin" after an incident in which the British novelist Ada Leverson recalls that:

> I suggested to Oscar Wilde that he should go a step further than these minor poets; that he should publish a book all margin; full of beautiful unwritten thoughts, and have this blank volume bound in some Nile-green skin powdered with gilt nenuphars and smoothed with hard ivory, decorated with gold by Ricketts (if not Shannon) and printed on Japanese paper...[121]

If Wilde did not go so far as to produce a book "all margin," Leverson's jest nevertheless struck at a serious preoccupation of Wilde's. Not only do highly decorative Japanese objects—including a book printed on Japanese paper[122]—populate the lush interiors of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but Wilde in his later years produced several editions of his own works on high-quality Japanese vellum.[123] Lavery writes of such luxury editions that their "advertisements mark the half-acknowledged limit of a text's capacity to transcend its own materiality," that "the pleasure of the book is derived from contemplating matter exquisitely but imperfectly yoked to form."[124] The exquisite pleasure, we might say, of contemplating the corpse.[125]

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117 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 50-1.

118 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 377-8.

119 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 314.

120 Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese; Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan for the Use of Travellers and Others* (4th ed., rev. & enl., London, Yokohama: J. Murray, Kelly & Walsh, 1902), 196.

121 Ada Leverson, Reminiscences, quoted in Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 55.

122 "When he had stretched himself on the sofa, he looked at the title-page of the book. It was Gautier's 'Émaux et Camées,' Charpentier's Japanese-paper edition, with the Jacquemart etching. The binding was of citron-green leather, with a design of gilt trellis-work and dotted pomegranates." Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Ward Lock & Co., 1891), 243.

123 Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 76.

124 Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 75.

125 And indeed contemplation of the corpse (*kusözu*) is historically an important spiritual and aesthetic practice in Japanese art and philosophy and in Buddhism generally.

Just as the corpse is the ultimate expression of the body's materiality *at the expense of the immaterial "content" of personhood*, the book which is "all margin" is the vindication of the materiality of the "text" *to the exclusion of the text itself* (which is normally understood to constitute the content of a book). That is: form, taken to the logical extreme, tends to annihilate content, in an asymmetrical relationship which does not allow for the reverse to be true. Form in every case precedes and conditions the production of content; content is placed in a perilous situation of dependency, wherein on one hand the absence, and on the other hand the pure and total expression, of form necessarily leads to its eradication. Thus Algernon Charles Swinburne leveled the following invective at the Japanist painter James McNeill Whistler: "Japanese art is not merely the incomparable achievement of certain harmonies in colour; *it is the negation, the immolation, the annihilation of everything else*."[126] Of what, for Swinburne, did "everything else" consist? Of Whistler's portraits he remarked sarcastically that they were "liable to the damning and intolerable imputation of possessing…[qualities] which actually appeal to the intelligence and the emotions, to the mind and heart of the spectator."[127]

If, from the point of view of form, the book can be said *positively* to be "all margin" or the corpse to be "all body," a *negative* formulation from the point of view of content is also possible: the book is *empty* of text, the corpse is *empty* of life.[128] The form (the exterior) is preserved even as the content (the interior) withers and dies. The dominant British imperial mode was predicated on the universalization of certain types of content (matters of "intelligence and the emotions," "the mind and heart," ethical directives such as freedom, natural rights, human sympathy), to which form was essentially incidental. By contrast, the dominant Japanese philosophical-aesthetic mode (at least as perceived by British intellectuals) was one of empty form, which tended not only to marginalize but to *work against* the propagation of content.

Mary Crawford Fraser's novel *The Stolen Emperor*, set in a fictionalized Heian Japan (that is, the "Old Japan"), follows the plight of the Empress Jito as her husband (the Emperor) is murdered and she and her young son (now become the titular "Stolen Emperor") are kidnapped and held in Gothic confinement by Kashima, an ambitious young daimyo. Blouin reads the sickly, effete murdered Emperor as standing for the Old Japan and the brash, brutal young usurper Kashima for the New Japan, both sides for Jito "synonymous with death."[129] But just as important to Jito's Radcliffean persecution as the Gothic characters of the untimely-deceased lover and the relentlessly lascivious villain are the unmistakably Gothic spaces of the novel: the antique palace and the foreboding castle, places of imprisonment willing and unwilling, of haunting beauty and dignified decay. Fraser's Japanism is, in a word, obsessed with the representation of empty space.

When we first see Kashima entering the Imperial Palace, he finds three garden-courtyards, all sumptuously described. His entrance into the third, "the great courtyard leading to the Hall of State," is narrated thus:

> the golden background gleamed soft and pure under drifts and showers of white and milky blooms; lilies underfoot, white pomegranates above, those quivering sheaves of unearthly whiteness, translucent as shredded moonbeams, yet warm and thrilling in their passionate purity, like virgin hearts under veils of snow.
>
> "The frame is fair," Kashima's eyes seemed to say, "but empty—empty yet."[130]

126 Algernon Charles Swinburne, under Whistler's title of "An Apostasy," in James McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, as Pleasingly Exemplified in Many Instances, Wherein the Serious Ones of This Earth, Carefully Exasperated, Have Been Prettily Spurred on to Unseemliness and Indiscretion, While Overcome by an Undue Sense of Right* (1890; New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1916), 252. Qtd in Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 66. Emphasis from original.

127 Swinburne, in Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, 252.

128 Emptiness (*sūnyatā*) is, probably not coincidentally, a key concept in Buddhist thought and particularly in Zen Buddhism. *Sūnyatā* is in fact almost entirely a different philosophical and aesthetic concept than the Western "emptiness" as I will describe it here; but this does not mean that it was not liable to creative (mis)translations and (mis)interpretations by Westerners.

129 Blouin, *Japan and the Cosmopolitan Gothic*, 74.

130 Fraser, *The Stolen Emperor*, 15.

This garden is composed of such "pure" beauty as to be devoid even of color; it is an "unearthly," "empty" beauty, allowing for only the "virginal" forms of flowers and fruits, uncontaminated by meaning. Kashima's judgemental attitude, his "empty yet," would seem to suggest that it is he who will finally "fill" this beauty with some kind of recognizable content (justice, progress, freedom, or the like), but we find that he, too, deals only in empty spaces. He imprisons Jito and her son in a long-abandoned castle, "dead and cold as a granite tomb," whose rooms are as empty of furnishings as they are of people.[131] This castle of Jito's Gothic confinement is worse even than the "casket-like" apartments of her dead husband, which at least were lovely.[132] Both the "Old" and the "New" Japan, then, are mediated effectively by emptiness, and can produce only emptiness.

Ode on a Japanese Screen, or: A Land Outside of History

If the Japanese art object is, in its purest form, a corpse, what becomes of the Japanese person? One of the most persistent tropes in British narratives on Japan was, after all, the apparently striking resemblance between the Japanese person and the Japanese thing. Recall the last shogun's ghostly procession, of which Mitford wrote: "the Shōgun and his nobles were clad in the immemorial Court dress; flowing trousers as long as the train of a Buckingham Palace great lady, loose hempen jackets, and the curious little black lacquer caps like boxes (yéboshi) on their heads. You may see them portrayed on golden screens and old paintings."[133] Observing her fellow (Japanese) passengers on the train to Tokyo, Bird makes a remarkably similar comment: "I feel as if I had seen them all before, so like are they to their pictures on trays, fans, and tea-pots."[134] In these evaluations (and countless others like them), the racialized personhood of the Japanese is mediated by objects in at least two ways: first by the Japanese objects worn as ornaments (Mitford lingers on the objects of "immemorial" dress; Bird's description as well references the clogs, costume, and particular hairstyle worn by Japanese men, women, and children) and second by the reproduction of these ornamented bodies *on other ornamental objects* (screens, paintings, trays, fans, and tea pots).

This tendency to elide the object and the person in accounts of Japaneseness exemplifies Cheng's observation that racialized objects racialize people, and vice versa. Cheng writes that "ornamentalism describes the peculiar processes (legally, materially, imaginatively) whereby personhood is named or conceived through ornamental gestures, which speak through the minute, the sartorial, the prosthetic, and the decorative."[135] Placing Japan in the realm of the decorative, the represented, the ornamental, also places it in an uncanny, or at least unstable, relation to historical time. A cliché of both Japanese art and life (now as well as in the nineteenth century) is their "timelessness": Mitford calls Tokugawa Yoshinobu's costume "immemorial"; Kipling speaks of "a Court whose outer fringe is aggressively European, but whose heart is Japan of long ago"; Chamberlain writes that "Japanese armour might serve as a text for those authors who love to discourse on the unchanging; character of the East."[136] Indeed, it seems that the Old Japan's relentless, exacting production of beauty is tied to its unchanging Oriental "sloth" or "repose," its refusal to take part in Western history as such—its long immersion in what Mitford calls "the mystic darkness of a prehistoric cloister."[137]

In order to understand this relation, we must linger for a moment in what may seem a decidedly *un*-Gothic setting: "fairyland." Another persistent trope in European writings on Japan from at least the eighteenth century is of Japan as "fairyland," "elf-land,"

131 Fraser, *The Stolen Emperor*, 115.

132 The emperor's apartments are described as "a room overlaid with gold and colour till its walls and ceiling shone like the facets of some dark jewel; the air was dusky with perpetual gloom, for the light of day only reached this sacred shrine after passing through the galleries and corridors which surrounded it, and penetrating the delicate scented blinds which were hung across every opening. The place was a casket—for a lustreless gem" (26). Note that "casket" has the double meaning of a container for a corpse and one for a precious stone.

133 Mitford, *Memories*, 395.

134 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 29.

135 Cheng, *Ornamentalism*, 18.

136 Kipling, *Kipling's Japan*, 214; Chamberlain, *Things Japanese* (1902), 41.

137 Mitford, *Memories*, 467.

a land of miniature people, or otherwise half-magical, half-dreamed: a land generically indistinguishable from the fictional (that is, not a "real" place but *merely* imagined, *merely* represented).[138] Japan's centuries-long withdrawal from contact with Europeans left it a kind of blank, a gap in the known/knowable world which, as the space of absolute distance (the farthest reach of the Far East), was easily filled by imagination. The modern reader might be surprised, for example, to find in *Gulliver's Travels*, alongside the blatantly fictional realms of Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and Laputa, a visit to Japan.[139] The idea of Japan-as-fairyland acquired a momentum which outlasted the (more-or-less) literal unknowability of Japan, appearing well into the late nineteenth century. "I never saw anything more completely like a fairy scene," Bird writes of a Japanese festival, "the undulating waves of lanterns as they swayed along, the soft lights and soft tints moving aloft in the darkness, the lantern-bearers being in deep shadow."[140] The word "fairy" appears no less than six times in Bird's descriptions of Japan and Japanese people, and at least four in Kipling's.

If the ontological status of Japanese bodies is tied up with representations of the Japanese body in works of decorative art, the temporal status of Japaneseness is also tied up with the heavy stylization (that is, fictionality) of these representations. The Western "fairyland" is a place not so much before history but beyond it, outside of it; a place where time works differently, where all things are at once antique and novel, where the temporal "progress" of human history is largely a moot point.[141] In fact, the ahistoricity of fairyland—its removal from the concerns of "the world" as such—is a constitutive part of its unreality. Hearn writes of Yaizu that "the indescribably antique queerness of everything gives you that weird sensation of remoteness,—of the far away in time and place,—which makes one doubt the reality of the visible."[142] The Japanese derangement of linear time is also a derangement of reality, at least as "we" know it.

What happens in fairyland is inconsequential; it takes place outside of the "real" history of the world. For Kipling, the charming fairytale quality of Japan even eclipses its historical quality, which he acknowledges and then discards: "I had prepared in my mind," he writes, "moral reflections, purviews of political situations, and a complete essay on the future of Japan. Now I have forgotten everything except O-Toyo in the tea-house."[143] The sheer prettiness, the airy unreal perfection of Japanese life, effaces its "real" political, moral, and economical concerns. To call Japan a fairyland is to bracket it, to push it to the margins of "real" history and into the realm of fiction. Chamberlain's image of the mummy in its grave-clothes is the image of the body bracketed outside of time; transformed into an aestheticized body-object touched by neither the historical process of life nor of decay. Fairyland, too, is empty.

But there was also a recognition that this bracketing could only work temporarily, that just as the European was gaining access to this strange world outside of time it was disappearing before his eyes. "Does not the whole experience of the last three hundred years," Chamberlain asks, "go to prove that no Oriental state which retains distinctively Oriental institutions can hope to keep its territory free from Western aggression?"[144] There is a sense of inevitability, in Chamberlain's account, to the intrusion of history into the Japanese dream-world.

Kipling writes of a melancholy desire to freeze Japan in place, to bracket it indefinitely outside of the vulgarity of the world, literally to protect it from history:

> We stayed long in the half-light of that quaint place, and when we went away we grieved afresh that such a people should have

138 See Yokoyama, "Victorian Travellers in the Japanese 'Elf-land,'" in *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, 150-169.

139 Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts* (London: Printed for B. Motte, 1727).

140 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 381.

141 In my discussion of the idea of Japan as being outside of or at the end of history, I am much indebted to Lavery, who identifies a similar mode of thinking in several 20th-century thinkers. Alexandre Kojève, for example, characterizes the Japanese as "snobs" living at the end of history, where "Japan opens up the possibility
of a post-historical future in which humanness is preserved, but as form, rather than content." Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 28-30.

142 Hearn, *In Ghostly Japan*, 229.

143 Kipling, *Kipling's Japan*, 51.

144 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 220.

> a "constitution" or should dress every tenth young man in European clothes, put a white ironclad in Kobé harbor, and send a dozen myopic lieutenants in baggy uniforms about the streets.
>
> "It would pay us," said the Professor, his head in a clog-shop, "it would pay us to establish an international suzerainty over Japan to take away any fear of invasion or annexation, and pay the country as much as ever it chose, on condition that it simply sat still and went on making beautiful things while our men learned. It would pay us to put the whole Empire in a glass case and mark it, 'Hors concours,' Exhibit A."[145]

Kipling's image places Japan in the Victorian exhibition space: the very convergence of beauty and death. To place Japan on exhibit, to mark it "hors concours," is to label it a thing perfected, a fait accompli; to foreclose the possibility of historical development by removing it from the global capitalist economy of production and exchange ("hors concours" meaning literally "out of the competition"). The object on exhibit is a beautiful corpse (literally, in the case of the Egyptian mummies Victorians so loved to gawk at). Simultaneously, Kipling places Japan *in the future* in relation to Western modernity—the precise opposite of liberal-imperial historiographies which tended to place non-Western civilizations in the past. Japan must "sit still" and wait for Europe to catch up.

But the Professor speaks in the conditional; this exhibition was not to be. By the time of Kipling's writing, in 1889, Japan already had a constitution, was already building ironclads as part of a general program of industrialization and militarization. Japan's removal from "fairyland" and entrance into history proper opened up the possibility of a future determined not only (or even primarily) by the British imperial mission of universal rationality, liberal democracy, and free-market capitalism, but by an alternative Japanese imperialism of form, of surface, of an excess of beauty which moved ultimately towards emptiness.

145 Kipling, under editor's title "1889: Letter Two," in Cortazzi & Webb, eds., *Kipling's Japan*, 56.

An Empty Empire

Kipling may have quipped that "the Japanese makes a trim little blue-jacket, but he does not understand soldiering," but not all dismissed the growing military power of the Japanese so quickly out of hand, especially as the nineteenth century drew to a close and Japanese colonial conquest in East and Southeast Asia accelerated.[146] The 1895 Japanese defeat of China in the first Sino-Japanese War, which resulted in treaties giving Japan privileged trading rights with Korea and control over Taiwan, caused shock waves in the Western press (though somewhat less so than the 1904 Japanese defeat of Russia). Before the war, Kent wrote, "Japan was regarded very much as the Fortunate Islands of the modern world." But "when the war with China broke out, this fond vision of the fancy was rudely dispelled. It was seen that the Japanese could draw the sword as well as draw designs."[147]

Kent sets up an opposition between "drawing the sword" and "drawing designs."[148] But this apparent contradiction was perhaps not so contradictory to others as it seemed to Kent; to many who claimed best to "know" Japan, there had always been an unsettling edge to the Japanese formalism. Indeed, the Japanese love of beauty and of death might be understood to be premised on the same passion for form, the same essential emptiness; Japanese art was, after all, synonymous with annihilation. Alexander Innes Shand's popular article "The Romance of the Japanese Revolution," appearing in *Blackwood's* in 1874, begins at an art exhibition and ends in prediction of war. He writes of a Japanese suit of armor that "It was eloquent of the romantic side of the Japanese life and manners, which *in their very picturesqueness were a standing menace to strangers*;" of the samurai training for *hara-kiri* that "The Japanese youths were taught to die as boys with us are taught to dance."[149] Accompanying these historical declarations is the warning that the

146 Kipling, *Kipling's Japan*, 74.

147 Kent, "The New Japanese Constitution," 420.

148 Incidentally, the very same opposition which Ruth Benedict would attempt to address, decades later, in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.

149 Alexander Innes Shand, "The Romance of the Japanese Revolution," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* v.155 (Jan.-June 1874), 699-700, 704. Emphasis mine. See also Yokoyama's analysis of this article in *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, 134-7.

Japanese intimacy with death easily bleeds into an aesthetic passion for killing; that, among the Japanese, murder may indeed be considered as one of the fine arts.

Bird, in a brief and bizarre aside, informs her reader of the phenomenon of "lacquer poisoning."[150] Lacquer was (and is) widely considered the most original, and the most perfect, of Japanese crafts; in Bird's words, "that celebrated varnish which gives its name to the most beautiful of Japanese manufactures."[151] But the beauty of Japanese lacquer was—literally—a dangerous beauty. Bird tells us that "The smell or touch, or both combined, of new lacquer produces in a great many people, both natives and foreigners, a very uncomfortable malady known as 'lacquer poisoning,' which in mild cases affects the skin only, but in severe ones the system generally."[152] Perhaps Bird only intended to impart to her reader an amusing anecdote. But the concept of "lacquer poisoning" encapsulates well the sense of danger associated with Japanese perfection of form. Lacquer is the medium of the surface *par excellence*; a medium used to adorn boxes, bowls, plates, the sorts of things whose very emptiness tends to signal their beauty. The production of lacquer is the production of emptiness both in the sense that a more "perfect" craft item, however objectively functional, is less likely to be put to use; and in the sense that lacquer in the its most perfect form is utter blackness, betraying nothing of itself and in fact only reflecting the image of the viewer back to him.[153] It is thus a substance which must be handled carefully, lest its relentless pursuit of superficial perfection be in fact the pursuit of the annihilation of meaning, and a danger to all who come near.

If the ghost corresponds to a Gothic Japanist imagination of the Japanese past (or Japanese past-ness), and the Doppelgänger to an imaginary of the Japanese present, then the corpse is the abject vision of Japanese futurity. Projected forward, the Japanese obsession with form tends towards an emptying, an annihilation, a hollowing out. When H.G. Wells describes the Time Traveller's encounter with the Eloi in his 1895 Gothic science fiction novel *The Time Machine*, he may just as well be describing the Japanese. The Eloi are "exquisite," petite, frail, laughing, fairy-like, androgynous, curious and playful as children. (They are even, as were most pre-Meiji Japanese, vegetarians.)[154] At the end of history, when evolution has run its awful course, the Time Traveller finds a race of hyper-refined beings who inhabit the literal surface of the Earth, while the (apparently) subordinate Morlocks are hidden away underground, a space habitually used for "the less ornamental purposes of civilization."[155] The Eloi are all form, all surface; as Pick puts it, "What Wells' time traveller discovers in the projected future of *The Time Machine* is a ruling class (the Eloi), which has become ever more beautiful, but 'indescribably frail', genderless, and mentally backward... He encounters a world of 'ruinous splendour' and degeneration."[156]

The analogy is not perfect, and I do not mean to suggest that Wells literally based the Eloi off of Japanese people (though there are moments in the text to suggest that he took inspiration, in creating their world, from a vague sort of Oriental aesthetics).[157] Rather, I mean to point out an essential sameness between the structuring anxieties of British Japanism and the type of Gothic degenerationist fantasy which found its most potent expression in *The Time Machine*. Perhaps civilization tends not towards perfection but towards its own end, towards death, emptiness, a withering away of content until only form remains: the corpse, an uncanny image of the former self. Perhaps this was the type of civilization which the emergence of Japan as an imperial power would bring forth.

At the same time, where the Eloi are ultimately weak and defenseless against the predatory Morlocks, the Japanese at the turn of the century were proving

150 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 193.

151 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 193. See also Lavery's analysis of lacquer, labor, and "finish" in *Quaint, Exquisite*, 63-4.

152 Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 193.

153 Thus fulfilling Wilde's dictum that "to reveal art and to conceal the artist is art's aim." From the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, v.

154 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine; an Invention* (Buckram Series. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1895), 52-5.

155 Wells, *The Time Machine*, 114.

156 Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 158.

157 For example: The Eloi have a "Dresden china type of prettiness" (54); the Palace of Green Porcelain is (obviously) "Oriental in its character. The face of it had the luster as well as the pale green tint, a kind of bluish green, of a certain type of Chinese porcelain" (122).

themselves far from hapless: a synthesis of beauty and strength, of drawing designs and drawing swords. Whatever the emptiness at the heart of Japanese civilization, it was not an absence of brute power. A 1902 article in *Pearson's* declared of Japan that "Her present dream is just this—to make herself, with the help of her navy, such a power on the eastern flank of Asia as Britain, her model in all things, is on the north-east of Europe...A pretty ambition for a little nation who has only awakened to modern life within memory!—but not one unlikely to be realised."[158] Japan's "prettiness" and "littleness" do not disappear in these speculations of imperial ascendancy but remain, paradoxically, a constitutive aspect of Japan's beautiful, and profoundly Other, mode of empire.

Conclusion: Towards Death

When those intrepid souls from the empire on which the sun never set stepped off the ship at Yokohama and into the land of the rising sun, they discovered a virtual menagerie of wonders. Things exquisite and grotesque, beautiful and terrible, unspeakably ancient and shockingly modern. Among them: a restless spirit; an uncanny double; a beautiful corpse.

It has long been a commonplace in studies of modern imperialism, and particularly British imperialism, that empires seek to know, to assimilate increasing swaths of people and territories into a single, totalizing epistemology. For the British empire, though, Japan represented an absolute limit, a boundary of the known and knowable. Shand wrote that:

> Japan has always been enveloped in mystery, thanks to its jealous policy of exclusion; and now that its ports are thrown open to us, it is more of a mystery than ever. The story of our intercourse with it during the last quarter of a century has resembled in all respects a historical romance. It has abounded in sensations and startling surprises. It has been a succession of plots cleverly contrived to puzzle us, and of which we scarcely yet hold the clue. The grand *dénouement* is to come, and the best-informed observers are watching for it in hopeless mystification.[159]

In the case of Japan, Shand tells us, to know more was to know less. Japan confronted Britain as a civilization which refused to obey the modern, rational taxonomies of race, historical time, and aesthetic production.

It is here, I think, that the Gothic became helpful, as a literary mode of extreme fictionality capable of encompassing profound ambivalence, of unsettling the natural and the normal (that is, the taken-for-granted), of registering the terror of the encounter with the foreign. Fredrick Garber suggests that the Gothic genre is centrally concerned with the form of the confrontation and the "shocks of cognition" produced by such confrontation.[160] As a historical confrontation between radically different modes of life, the late-Victorian confrontation with Meiji Japan produced such Gothic shocks in the individual subjects who literally encountered Japan (including those authors analyzed herein) as well as in the larger cultural and political imaginary of the Western world (whose encounter with Japan was largely mediated by texts such as those of Mitford, Bird, Kipling, Fraser, and Hearn). If these initial shocks were often recuperated into new forms of thinking, being, and doing which today seem relatively unproblematic—I am thinking about Impressionist painting, New Age religions, and, of course, the Anglophone haiku—they also produced Gothic excesses which evaded such recuperation.[161] These excesses can be tracked in Japanist texts in moments of fear, uncertainty, and discomfort—moments when the authoritative discourse of the Orientalist slips into the fancy of the Gothic novelist.

If these textual traces, though, serve as a record of particular events in the intellectual and affective lives of our authors (that is, a historical record), I wish to suggest as well that these events were preconditioned by the literary forms which may seem merely to

158 M. Tindal, "The Jack Tar of Japan," *Pearson's Magazine* v. 14 (1902), 412.

159 Shand, "The Romance of the Japanese Revolution," 700.

160 Frederick Garber, "Meaning and Mode in Gothic Fiction," in Harold E. Pagliaro, ed., *Racism in the Eighteenth Century*, Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), 157-61.

161 See Lavery's reading of the Anglophone haiku: "The Pre-Raphaelite Haiku," in Lavery, *Quaint Exquisite*, 81-112.

register them ex post facto. Confronted with the absolute foreignness of the Japanese, their multitude of paradoxes and contradictions, British subjects reached for modes of perception capable of mediating such experiences of shocking strangeness, and forms of language capable of narrating them. Perhaps "reached for" suggests too long and too intentional a moment of processing or formulating, when what I really mean is that the Gothic was already so available as such a mode of perception and form of language (already so naturalized, so "common sense") that the moment of experience was simultaneous with the moment of fictionalization; Japan was experienced, immediately, as a *real fiction*. My implicit contention throughout this essay has been in this sense that "Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life."[162]

The literary mediates between the subject and the real world in the immediate manner which I have just described, but this is only to take the point of view of the author; the (more or less) literary texts these authors produced then proceeded to mediate between reading Anglophone subjects and the real world as it was understood abstractly to exist ("out there"). In other words, these texts were the most immediate experience available to most Anglophone readers of the farthest reaches of the real world (which Japan was understood to constitute), for the simple reason that the vast majority of late-nineteenth century British, Anglophone, and Western subjects in general *never set foot in Japan*. Even Japan enthusiast Wilde famously failed to realize his plans to visit the archipelago.[163] Instead, Wilde and scores of other *fin de siècle* readers relied on Mitford, Bird, Hearn, and other such intermediaries to make Japan real.

These authors certainly did, in many ways, answer the call to make Japan "real" by performing the traditional task of the Orientalist: gathering vast amounts of quantitative and qualitative knowledge, cataloging, analyzing, and categorizing, "taking the immense fecundity of the Orient and making it systematically, even alphabetically, knowable by Western laymen."[164] But these attempts tended to fall short; to admit at some point or another their bewilderment, their uncertainty, their ultimate failure to render Japan totally knowable. In (among other things) its unstable relation to linear historical time, its uncanny capacity for imitation, and its commitment to form, Japan refused to manifest itself as fully real—that is, as a thing of this earth, something natural and rationally comprehensible, an unfamiliarity merely waiting to become familiar. The idea of Japan developed and persisted, instead, as an absolute strangeness, something only ever partially grasped, a perpetual site of doubt, always escaping the limits which attempted to contain it. So the movement was double: the literary Gothic provided a mode by which to perceive and a language by which to narrate the strange problem of Japan, and the resultant idea of Japan as paradoxical and unreal in turn sustained the vitality of the Gothic as just such a mode of apprehension and articulation.

Scholarship on such anxious encounters between white Anglophones and Japan (or non-white peoples more broadly) has tended to reduce these Gothic moments to the white Anglophone subject's fear that "*such foreignness existed within themselves all along*."[165] But this line of argument retreats unnecessarily back to the Anglo position, such that not only is the white author the only subject, but the only conceivable *object* of fear or anxiety. Not only can we learn nothing of the Other from the Orientalist discourse, we cannot even glean anything of the Orientalist's true relationship with the non-white world, for his encounter with the foreign is only ever sublimated back into his fear of himself. In the crudest terms, then, I am proposing that the fundamental anxiety engendered by the idea of Japan, and given voice to by Gothic Japanism, was merely that "*such foreignness existed*."

In doing so, I preserve the real alterity of Japan for the British subject and thus the realness of alterity as such, refusing to do away with Japan's foreignness altogether just because the ways in which that foreignness was apprehended were often shortsighted, if not outright racist. That such strangeness remains a powerful and productive force can be seen, I believe, in the fact that the intimate relation between the Gothic and the idea of Japan has resonated remarkably across time, and continues to function as a locus of the

162 Wilde, "The Decay of Lying."

163 And what a loss for literature! This anecdote is briefly discussed in Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, 56.

164 Said, *Orientalism*, 65.

165 Blouin, *Japan and the Cosmopolitan Gothic*, 3. Emphasis from the original.

inexplicable, the ambivalent, and the unsettling.[166] I insist on the preservation of this alterity not so much because I wish to preserve Japan's privileged position as *the* Other Empire, but because I insist on the aesthetic and political value of the Gothic shock, the odd encounter, the brush with the foreign; of reaching out *through* and *with* terror; towards elsewhere, towards the unknowable, towards death.

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166 If I may be excused for making such a temporal leap without the rigorous genealogical demonstration necessary to establish a relationship as truly historical. It is, I think, obvious enough to any casual consumer of Anglophone popular culture that Japan retains an association with horror, the supernatural, the fantastical, and the bizarre. This association has been confirmed for me time and time again during the process of writing this paper as, in describing this project to peers, I have received countless variations of the following response: "Oh! Have you seen/read/played/heard of this movie/novel/series/video game?" I take this as evidence—albeit anecdotal—that I am justified in claiming that some form at least of Gothic Japanism remains a compelling mode of aesthetic production.

Instances, Wherein the Serious Ones of This Earth, Carefully Exasperated, Have Been Prettily Spurred on to Unseemliness and Indiscretion, While Overcome by an Undue Sense of Right. 1890. New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1916.

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