

The Return of the Ancestors: Reading the Anglo-Irish Gothic

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Abstract

The Gothic tradition underwent a revival toward the turn of the twentieth century after a decline in popularity in the mid-nineteenth century. The new Gothic focused more intensely on the inner mind than the classical Gothic, as we see in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and *Dracula* (1897). This inward turn led to the eventual transformation of the Gothic into what I would call a “narrative of haunting” in the twentieth century—two of the best examples being the works of Virginia Woolf and Henry James. But the Gothic also appeals to collective anxieties caused by urbanization and industrialization. In this paper I want to look into the uniquely nationalist dimensions of the Gothic with special reference to the return of the ancient father/mother in Anglo-Irish Gothic literature. The idea of ancestral return, after all, need not only be read in supernatural terms; it can also be read in (post)colonial ones, in the context of expatriation and repatriation. With the awakening of nationalist sentiments, as in late 19th- and early 20th-century Ireland, expatriates may find themselves increasingly alienated in their own “homeland,” uncanny strangers in their own “house.” Looking at the works of two Anglo-Irish writers, Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), I suggest that the expatriated or estranged Anglo-Irishman fantasizes the “return” of his native (Irish) ancestor as representing the native homeland. Such a “ghostly” fantasizing can be seen as both symptom and cure, and above all as an expression of the ambivalence of Anglo-Irish attitudes toward the return of their ancient, ancestral land.

Keywords

Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, Gothic, the return of the ancestors, homeland, expatriation, repatriation, Anglo-Irish, the uncanny

The Settler Daughter

The Anglo-Irish writer Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) tells of the mysterious encounters of an English settler's daughter's in Styria (Romania). Though having settled for centuries in this alien and turbulent country, her family tries to maintain its English roots by, among other things, insisting on speaking English at home. Since Laura's mother died when she was young, she feels isolated and longs for companionship. By chance Laura meets a stranger, Carmilla, and the girls instantly become good friends. Indeed, in an uncanny way they recognize each other from a common dream they both had when they were very young. (In that dream, Carmilla was apparently vampirized without her being fully aware of the malicious nature of this event.) During her stay, Carmilla divulges no information about herself or her family, but there is clearly something mysterious about her behavior. She has a habit of sleeping during the day and sleep-walking at night. And she becomes outraged when Laura sings a hymn as a funeral procession passes by. To Laura's further bewilderment, Carmilla looks exactly like one of her ancestors in a family portrait. Carmilla resembles the matriarch down to the mole on her neck—even though Countess Mircalla Karnstein lived two centuries before.

The mystery thickens as Laura and her father set out for the ruined village of Karnstein, their place of origin. They meet General Spieldorf, who tells of the tragic encounter of his own niece. It seems a countess had asked the general to put up her daughter Millarca for three weeks; the general's niece, sleeping in another room, soon fell ill, and was suspected of being a victim of vampirism. At the advice of a wise man, the general hid in his niece's chamber and ambushed a cat-like figure who, of course, turned out to be Millarca, their house guest. Millarca miraculously fled through the closed door but the general's niece died of the vampire's bite soon afterwards. As they talked about the tragic event, Carmilla arrived on the scene and the general immediately recognized her to be Millarca; he killed her after a fierce struggle. The party then moved on to Karnstein to find Mircalla's grave, in order to ward off future vampire attacks. Then it suddenly dawned on them that Mircalla (their ancestor), Millarca (the general's house guest), and Carmilla (Laura's roommate) were actually one and the same person, reincarnated in different guises at different times, and in different places. As they were all one and the same person, it was only natural that their names should be anagrams of one another.

Here I paraphrase the story at length to call attention to a number of critical points. Laura and General Spieldorf's niece—and perhaps any other settlers'

daughters, for that matter—lived as strangers in their adopted country, one that they have since called their own. One wonders if alienation from their native land in a uniquely colonial way may not, then, make them vulnerable to vampire attacks. Ironically, however, their attackers are not strangers, much less aliens; they are actually these helpless girls' ancestors or progenitors. Is there, therefore, something that "runs in the family" that exposes the descendants to the danger of their ancestors' return? One may even detect some family resemblances between the victimizers and the victimized. In *Carmilla*, the personae from two historical periods (the late 17th century and the early 19th century)¹ are alike, in name as well as in looks, if not in vampiric habits. As such the story seems to be addressed to the family romance of a settler daughter. Due presumably to anxiety about her isolated and precarious life in an alien country, we might think the daughter *fantasizes* her relationships with her parents and ancestors. In each fantasy her ancestor returns, time and again, to haunt her in her helpless state.

The Anglo-Irish writer Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) initially also adopted Styria as the vampire's home base, with *Carmilla*'s influence visible all through the novel. Clearly, there is something that runs in the blood—from ancient to modern times and from the margin to the center of Western civilization—which enables the alien (Eastern European, but also "from" the 15th century) Count Dracula to invade the heart of the empire (London) and attack Lucy, a member of the British upper-middle class. Here the idea of kinship is stretched very far. If the Count can be taken as an ancestor it is only so in the far-fetched sense that he lives/lived in the Middle Ages and is/was based in the middle of nowhere, in Transylvania. And yet the victimizer and victim somehow seem "kindred spirits," if only in the sense that they both possess (more or less) human blood. Indeed blood is the focus of vampirism in a double sense. In the Middle Ages blood was regarded as the very essence of life—and was also thought to be identical with (or a form of) semen. In the second half of the 19th century, the true nature of blood and its circulation were still little understood, despite all the scientific advances, thus giving rise to the often-discussed scene of transfusion in the novel. It seems safe to say that blood was regarded as "running all over" and might just be the primary medium of infection when the British Empire came in "contact" with its colonies—a fear made most visible in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. One shouldn't be surprised to

¹ Styria was historically known for its Catholic domination in the seventeenth century (especially under Ferdinand of the Holy Roman Empire). And religious persecution of Protestants did not let up until the nineteenth century during the Habsburg Monarchy. The religious repression seems to have lent itself to depictions in Gothic fiction of the Catholic establishment as a feared persecutor.

find echoes of *Carmilla*'s Laura in *Dracula*'s Lucy, since not only are these two texts separated by a mere 15 years—both were written by Irish writers with English backgrounds.

The timing of the two novels (*Carmilla* and *Dracula*) is significant, as this period witnessed the rise of nationalist sentiments in both a constitutional and a military sense. To make the situation worse—from the Empire's point of view, that is—the so-called earlier "informal empire," sustained by free trade, was soon to be replaced by the New Imperialism generally dated from 1872-1914 (Brantlinger 7; Hobsbawm 109).² Due to increasing competitions amongst colonial powers during the second Industrial Revolution, attention was now turned to overseas territories, e.g. India and Africa. The Empire had to come up with an ideology of one kind or another to justify its colonial power and exploitation. In a strict sense, the natives had to be reckoned with—or, better yet, come to term with—for the first time in the Empire's history. Not that England's rule of Ireland had been benign. Quite the contrary, Ireland's history under English rule always filled with blood and tears. But somehow, with the Act of Union (1800) which signified formal annexation, the government had to take into consideration the issue of legitimation. The parliament had to respond to calls for an end to discrimination against the Irish Catholics. But the remedies clearly came too late, and nationalist sentiments were on the rise, finally forcing Britain's hand: the Irish Free State was established in 1922.

Thus the "Irish Gothic" flourished concurrently with the English parliament's unsuccessful efforts to solve the Irish situation and the eventual rise of the Irish insurgency. The mental mapping of these two happenings—colonizers' legislative remedies and colonists' demand for autonomy—must be very complex. Not only do they not dovetail each other, but distortions arise as we try to take the Irish Gothic as a form of representation of the Empire's troubles. That is, when the troubles are "brought home" (in both a geographical and psychological sense), some distortion is inevitable, involving intricate mental mechanisms not immediately visible. In short, the Irish Gothic can indeed be seen as a mapping of images—though in a sort of distorted mirror—of the British Empire.

In other words, imperial anxieties are often projected onto overseas agents. After all, they are the proxies who have had first-hand information on the state of

² New Imperialism refers to the ideology of imperialism with special emphasis on profitability. In terms of timing, New Imperialism coincides roughly with the Second Industrial Revolution in which new forces such as Germany, the U.S., and Japan rise and put an end to the monopoly of the British Empire and its dominance in the First Industrial Revolution. *Pax Britannica*'s hegemony comes to a gradual end after the Franco-German War of 1871. Brantlinger even argues that amidst Britain's imperialist expansion, there is already a degree of reluctance at home (7).

the Empire. Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* is a perfect example of the Empire under siege by darkness from all directions—i.e., by forces that are not quite comprehensible to an imperial agent. If the agent is of the un-feeling type, colonial experience soon depletes an official of his humanity. The *papier maché* station manager in Conrad's novel and Adela's fiancée in *A Passage to India* are but two examples of such colonial dehumanization. But what is of greater interest must be the type of the expatriate. Regardless of whether an expatriate exploits the natives to the extent that he becomes dehumanized, an expatriate is by definition one who finds himself confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, he identifies with the territory and, in the case of an Anglo-Irish settler, has called it home for generations. Unfortunately, despite his efforts to be at one, as it were, with the land he governs, he finds himself often at odds with the natives. In most cases, after a period of settlement this stranger finds out that he can no longer return to what used to be home but is instead stranded in this home. To his further shock, he finds something uncanny about this one-time home of his as it turns *unheimlich*. Living at home that is not in the strict sense of the word "home" any more, he now fears that things may not be what they appear to be after all, and in a colonial family romance, as it were, he fantasizes a father replacing with his current one. Furthermore, in a collective Gothic turn of mind, the "medieval" ancestor may be imagined to be coming home now to haunt his descendants. One may even go one step further and suggest that the modern settler's bad conscience is responsible for all the distortions that are so characteristic of the modern Irish Gothic. And the last three decades leading up to the turn of the 20th century are pivotal precisely because they provide an opportunity for us to look into these Gothic anxieties.

The Expatriate

To return means to come back to where one has originated. In an everyday context, when a commuter leaves and returns home on a daily basis, the routine is not likely to cause much excitement. On the other hand, if a return follows a long interval of separation, the place one returns to tends to give a heightened sense of "Home, Sweet Home." And in the event of one's being forced to leave home, quite against one's wishes, the feelings of return tend to be even stronger. In ancient times, banishment was often imposed upon a dissident, for example, to backward regions. Such sufferings are best summed up in Dante's well-known comparison of exile to salty bread and someone's steep stairs. Here we are talking specifically about expatriation, of one being sent abroad, involving great agony not present in

routine commuting. Paradoxically, the word “expatriation” also takes on the additional meaning of becoming a settler being dispatched in the first place to administer a colony. Quite often, the “expatriate,” or the colonial officer in question, becomes quite settled in the territory in time and stays behind after quitting his office. Of even greater interest are the descendants of such a colonial officer who have since become ordinary citizens of the colony—albeit still enjoying special privileges under the colonial rule. The question of these “resident aliens” provides ample materials for a study of Anglo-Irish anxieties immediately before and after the turn of the 20th century.

Etymologically, the word “expatriate” comes from “*ex-*” (to remove) plus “*patri*” (native country). Two opposite readings are thus possible. An expatriate can be forcibly removed from his/her home country, as in the case of banishment. But an expatriate can also be an overseas settler or emigrant who has since settled in the newly adopted land. In due course, an expatriate may become so naturalized to the new county that he/she eventually renounces his/her original citizenship—in terms of identity, if not nationality. An “expatriate-turned-native” may thus switch allegiance, as it were, to the newly-adopted nation.³ The Protestant Ascendancy, for example, handed over political and social domination in Ireland to the English expatriates, as well as Scottish Presbyterian immigrants as early as Elizabeth I’s time. They had long since identified with the colony and grew quite dominant and comfortable in this adopted country by the eighteenth century. The inter-ethnic tensions became so intense that even the Act of Union (1800) and subsequent reforms were unable to fully placate the Catholic population whose land was all but dispossessed, not to mention other discriminatory measures against them (e.g., public office, voting and religious conversion). Despite a variety of ameliorating legislation throughout the century, military insurgence became increasingly well-organized and threatening to the ruling elite. The Anglo-Irish soon found themselves becoming expatriates in a double sense, i.e., as colonial rulers as well as the banished at the same time, in their would-be homeland. The anxieties were collective, sustained and deep-seated, so much so that they surfaced in, among other forms of representation, a uniquely Irish Gothic turn.

Like its antonym, “repatriation” also seems to have two opposite meanings. On the one hand, as a result of illegal acts of one kind or another, a fugitive or a refugee is returned, often by force, to his/her domicile by the host country. In a legal sense, “repatriation,” as *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, also refers

³ The adopted nation is often referred to as a territory, even though its residents may very likely identify with it as a nation—or, as if it were a nation.

to the “devolution or return of legislation to the constitutional authority of an autonomous country.” Though this usage is restricted mainly to the Canadian history, part of the word, “patriation,” does indicate more or less the same thing, but with a much wider circulation. The notion of “repatriation” (literally meaning “re-countryping” or “returning-to-nation”) points to a transfer of sovereignty in a post-colonial era. As such, it could refer to, on the one hand, forced transportation to one’s place of origin against one’s will; on the other, “repatriation” paradoxically implies a return of sovereignty to the colonized.⁴

It is thus clear that unlike their most straightforward physical sense of departure and return, expatriation and repatriation involve intricate departure-and-return dynamics and have a great impact on the “departed,” as well as the “returnee.” In expatriation and repatriation, he/she is subjected to mixed, and even contradictory feelings, especially with regards to personal and national identity. The identity of an expatriate is as a matter of fact rather overdetermined. Various political and cultural forces feed into how he/she sees him/herself in an uncannily alien/home “land.” In fact, expatriation and repatriation are almost always double-edged, as it were, and the ambivalence of this paradoxical “transit” mode cannot be compared with the fixity of those either permanently rooted at home or exiled abroad for a lengthy period of time.

In a theoretical sense, expatriation and repatriation provide fertile ground for the uncanny. In Freud’s reading, Hoffman’s tale begins with the sandman’s nocturnal visits to Nathaniel’s parents’ house, and this diabolical figure’s alleged threat to take out the children’s eyes if they disobey his orders to back off from the adults’ affairs. It turns out later that the sandman is no one else but Coppelius, the much-feared lawyer (Freud 335-76).⁵ When Nathaniel comes of age and goes to school away from home, Coppelius reappears, this time as Mr. Coppola, his namesake.⁶ Coppola installs glass eyeballs in Olympia, a life-like mechanical doll that Nathaniel is infatuated with. In a heated dispute between the two makers of the doll, it is smashed to pieces by its surrogate father, a Professor Spalanzani. The scene throws Nathaniel into another relapse of madness. After his second recovery

⁴ If imperialism has more to do with ideology, “repatriation” then extends the colonial presence even after the reversion of sovereignty, as the colonial ideology is preserved under the new administration. For example, Hong Kong’s post-1997 SAR administration retains the majority of the so-called rule of law under the British administration.

⁵ In Hoffman’s story, Coppelius, the reputed Sand-Man, turns from Nathaniel’s father’s collaborator to his murderer.

⁶ Names are important in one’s unconscious operations. We shall look into that in our discussion of Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*.

Nathaniel goes back to his fiancée, as the Oedipal scenario would have it.⁷ Soon afterwards, on a walk in town he and his fiancée climb up the high tower of the city hall. From its top, Nathaniel's attention is called to a scene down on the street. With his spy-glass given to him earlier by Coppola, he sees Coppelius, who returns after all those years of absence. The scene brings back his old trauma, and Nathaniel suffers a third attack of madness. He throws himself off the parapet.

There are a number of possible interpretations of Freud's reading of the uncanny here. One of them seems to be about confusions over distinctions between the real and the unreal, the inanimate and the animate, or the dead and the living. These confusions seem to be caused by a sense of loss of one kind or another. Specifically speaking, Nathaniel's three bouts of madness appear to be centered on his fear of the loss of eyeballs. In Freud's suggestion, Nathaniel's final breakdown can very well be read as his capitulation to a castration anxiety brought about by his fear of the father figure (in different disguises).

In terms of the related concept of family romance, a child caught in Oedipal tension tends to resort to fantasizing the absence of the father figure. In a classic situation, in addition to a son wishing away his father (e.g., Telemachus's ambivalent attitude toward his father's return after the latter's prolonged sojourn overseas), he may also project his anxieties unto a number of scenarios with oblique references to the parent-child conflict. For example, the father may be thought of as a surrogate parent, biologically false, that is—thus mediating the conflict by displacing their kinship relationship with something more secondary and less immediate. In this displacement operation, his rival siblings may also be thought of as being from a different bloodline, making the situation somehow less competitive and more controllable. One way or the other, the romance mediates the bipolar child-parent opposition by displacing the two terms with something less real, something more manageable. Here we often witness a drama involving fantasized characters and events. Be that as it may, some clues tend to be dropped here and there, and the core of Oedipal contentions seldom go unnoticed. One then wonders if Gothic fiction might not be read as a mode of family romance, a mode that emphasizes the return of a bad father. Phrased in a slightly different way, some Gothic stories may very well be read as accounts of the unspeakable trauma behind the return of one's *ancient* father (or paternal ancestor).

⁷ Nathaniel's fiancée, Clara, is described in Hoffman's story as a virtuous woman with a good common sense and she advises Nathaniel to purge himself of the darkness in his soul and thereby free himself from nightmares.

It must be pointed out, however, that although the phenomenon appears to be a universal one, the changing states of the Empire and Ireland's modernity definitely inject into the family romance a sense of historical and psychical poignancy. As the British Empire was increasingly confronted on the one hand with overseas competitions, and on the other insurgency of the natives, the Empire for the first time realized the real possibility of its decline at the turn of the century. The children of the grand Empire fantasized some sort of a family romance. Alien figures (including vampires) were imagined to be coming back to claim blood relation with their imperial offspring.⁸ This fantasized return created a deepened sense of anxiety amongst the imperial subjects as well as the contemporary readers of the Gothic. Initially an individual's psychic mechanism or even pathological state of mind, one involving aggression, transgression, and guilt, family romance seems to have now evolved into something more "collective." And by the turn of the 20th century, the New Gothic had become one of the most popular forms of fiction for Victorian readers.

But if the Gothic is to be read as a narrative about the Empire in decline in modern times, the unconscious of those staying home, more than that of the returnees, merits a closer examination.⁹ In Freud's piece on the uncanny, Nathaniel is clearly more deserving of investigation than the sandman and his doubles. Admittedly, the patriarch will find upon his return that his old home has now become at once familiar and unfamiliar.¹⁰ But the offspring, especially his namesakes stranded here and now, are even more traumatized than their progenitor. In other words, the return of the ancient father proves to be capable of delivering a shock of recognition to the returnee. But to the folks back home, especially his children, the shock is even more nerve-wracking as they are not quite able to come to terms with the return of something passé to the world here and now. The return arouses latent fear and anxieties that have been stored up (or dammed up) for a considerable period of time.

⁸ "Blood" is used here in a double sense, indicating both kinship relations between the ancestor and his/her descendants and the very physical act of vampirism.

⁹ The wandering Jew is a possible exception in that the emphasis is on the guilt of the progenitor rather than on that of his descendants. But the two can at times be woven together to show how guilt runs in the family as in Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820).

¹⁰ When Rip Van Winkle comes back to his village, he is shocked to find everything strange and different and yet (the mountains, river, houses) still the same (Freud's *unheimlich*). At first shocked a younger man who seems to be his double, he then finds out that his is his own son. (For Rip himself is the uncannily returning paternal ancestor.)

In developmental terms, Nathaniel is traumatized in his Oedipalization process. Since trauma tends to get transformed into an object, Nathaniel's trauma is embodied in threats posed by the sandman and his doubles. Specifically, Nathaniel is threatened with loss of eyesight. This fear, however, is not allowed to surface as it is; it must be acted out by proxy. In the second episode, Nathaniel finds himself in a different scenario (from his early domestic threat) and encounters Coppola, the optician, together with Olympia's glass eyes. The glass eyes are clearly objects of trauma, but what's significant is their mediatory function. As Lévi-Strauss puts it, bipolar opposition must be mediated so as to bring about reconciliations. For example, life and death are diametrically opposed to each other, but with the introduction of, for instance, hunting as a principle of life vis-à-vis war as that of death, the two terms may yet be seen as but two aspects of something related to violence that is initially unintelligible to primitive people. Raymond Williams further argues that mediation is more than a process; it should be viewed instead as an autonomous entity shot through with ideology and capable of redefining our relations with culture and society (Williams 171; Godzich 18-36). Here the glass eyes replace phallus as a vital appendage of the human body. As such, they are closely connected with Nathaniel's anxiety caused by Oedipalization.

And just as the object of anxiety tends to change its shape, the ancient father also undergoes transformations. In the narrative in question, the sandman is transformed first into Coppelius, the hated lawyer, and then Coppola, the optician, before looping back to Coppelius again in the tower scene. Significantly, Coppola (from "cupola," the dome-shaped structure at the top of a building that lets in light and air, similar in a way to an eyeball) the optician is the agent who puts glass eyes into the doll's head. Metonymically, the optician is also reified into glass eyes as well as the spy-glass that eventually enables Nathaniel to witness in his confused state the return of Coppelius the sandman after all those years. In other words, the trauma of Oedipalization is so overpowering that it must be narrated in a roundabout and exaggerated manner, with characters and events going through permutations. In a way, the story is like a Chinese box with one story set within another story which is placed within yet another story and so on. Most Gothic fiction develops in this frame-story model precisely for the same reason.

This repetitive structure is needed because it is only through repetition that the content of trauma can be emptied out. Initially, the parent-child tension is such that the Oedipal drama cannot be told in a straightforward manner. It thus requires mediation, often in visual terms, in order to make the trauma "narrate-able" in an unconventional logic. And true enough, Nathaniel undergoes different shocks that

are highly visual but do not exactly follow a narrative logic of either chronology or causality. Events are not ordered in an ordinarily structural sense and the three episodes do not seem to come together in a coherent manner. In the same way, characters also seem to be playing musical chair, as it were. As mentioned earlier, the sandman, Coppelius and Coppola are actually one and the same person in different guises. In the same manner, Nathaniel's desire cannot be told explicitly, either. Instead, despite steadfast support from Clara, his fiancée, Nathaniel's desire appears to lie elsewhere. Instead of seeking maternal care in his early childhood, Nathaniel now transfers his love enigmatically to Olympia, the mechanical doll implanted with Coppola's eyes. Unfortunately these eyes, in whatever form, are precisely what the ghostly parental figures seem to be after.

In a typical return motif, there must be some unsettled business and, worse yet, some grievances done to the ancient father during his lifetime that prompt his return as a ghost to haunt the living. In a Gothic light, it may very well be that the sandman story involves family romance in which a child fantasizes the patriarch's return home to claim something that the child has somehow refused to forfeit. In other words, in the child's fantasy, the father's return carries with it the threat of castration which gives rise to all sorts of ambivalences and reversions. Olympia's inanimate (glass) eyes are, for example, identified with Nathaniel's animate (bleeding) eyes. (After all, a child may not be quite capable of making a distinction between the inanimate and the animate.) Moreover, the eyes may very well be seen as outcome of *cathexis*, in which emotion is concentrated unto an object. Way back in one's early childhood—as well as in one's most primitive level of thinking—distinctions are not made and human desire is readily projected onto an object. To give this figure of speech a further turn, the eyes are but the concretization of an ancient desire now seeking to make its return to the folks back home.

In terms of representation, however, not everything is readily "represent-able" in a realist, much less literal, manner. It must undergo "selection and transformation so as to make [it] capable of being represented by images—particularly visual images" (Laplanche and Pontalis 390). For example, the abstract concept of an "aristocrat" must first be transformed into, "highly placed" before being concretized as "high tower," which is somehow more "represent-able" than its abstract counterparts. This mechanism is actually a form of regression back to the childhood stage in which the world is perceived mainly in visual terms (Laplanche and Pontalis 389). In terms of narrativity, a visualized object may very well be seen as a counter in one's long narrative return home where one's Oedipalization is eventually brought to a completion. Regression is also recurrent in traumatic

narrative. And instead of a realist mode of representation, regression takes one back to “a lower level as regards complexity, structure, and differentiation” (Laplanche and Pontalis 386). It often takes “the form of reversion, in a variety of forms, e.g., psychopathology, dreams, the history of civilizations, biology, etc.” (Laplanche and Pontalis 387). The Gothic mode of representation—or, to put it more appropriately, the handicaps inherent in the Gothic representation—provides us with yet another form of reversion. Specifically, one of the Gothic obsessions seems to lie in the return—feared and anticipated at the same time—of one’s desire and its anxiety. The anxiety is caused by prolonged delays in one’s return as well as the sense of poignancy and ambivalence triggered by the return.

To return to the ideas of expatriation and repatriation, a transit stage is more likely to induce anxieties in a traveler than a permanent resident in an alien country.¹¹ And in a prolonged transit one is even more likely to question where one’s allegiance lies: home or abroad? Specifically, which authority should one submit oneself to? In a sovereignty state, a citizen pledges unquestioned allegiance and obeys its laws governing departure and return. The age of Empire, however, saw a rapid increase in cross-border traffic through trade and immigration. The Empire and its citizens increasingly came into contact with the natives, as royal subjects living in an alien land or as immigrants in the inner city of the Empire (Hobsbawm 65). The contact with these “aliens” caused mixed feelings that are often difficult to understand or rationalize. The situation may get even more disturbing, if a traveler—or, for that matter, a settler—left his/her homeland for an alien country but failed to return in time for reasons beyond his/her control? What we see here then are some travelers or settlers in permanent transit. Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* leaves for the Congo as an idealist but eventually becomes morally corrupt because of his overstay in the alien land. In the eyes of Kurtz’s observer, Marlow, colonial power inevitably gets engulfed by the primeval darkness which lies beyond human comprehension. The story drops clear hints that the modern exploitation of the Congo is not all that different from the Roman invasion of England or the Elizabethans exploiting overseas territories. In Conrad’s work, the settled land is in and of itself the “Heart of Darkness,” and a settler after a period of sojourn inevitably succumbs to the corrupting forces of darkness. In the worst scenario, a settler runs the risk of becoming a hollow man as in the case of the station manager in the story. The manager has in fact turned into a *papier-mâché*,

¹¹ In science fiction, a character may even find himself transported to a time in the past or the future and confronted with shocks of recognition.

heartless and gutless thing, has become less than human in this alien country.¹² Unfortunately, the expatriate is not able to leave of his/her own accord.

The Protestant Ascendancy provides an even more intriguing test case as the sojourn literally turns into a collective overstay.¹³ Having settled in an adopted territory and since identified with the land (albeit as a privileged class), these settlers discover to their dismay that they have been increasingly treated as strangers in what they see as their own country. They experience a sense of powerlessness in the face of rapid rise in nationalism. And Gothic fiction of two 19th-century Irish writers seems to lend itself to a reading of this collective overstay and the ensuing anxieties about personal identity.

The Ancient Father

No discussion of the Gothic can do without *Dracula* (1897), but the story is not altogether original in plot, nor highly regarded as a literary work. The idea of vampirism is derived, among others, from Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. In both stories, vampirism takes place while the victim is in a semi-conscious state—either in her dreams (Laura in *Carmilla*) or during sleep-walking (Lucy in *Dracula*). The question of agency thus becomes ambivalent. In other words, are they victimized by a mysterious agent or do they willy-nilly wish to be victimized in the first place? The visitation, or the return, of the vampire appears, in other words, to be semi-voluntary. In *Dracula*, the British subjects open their doors of their own accord. Even Harker's trip to Transylvania on a real estate deal at the beginning of the story can be read as an invitation for an alien proprietor (from the uncivilized quarters of Transylvania) to gain a stake in the Empire. The transaction seems to dovetail historically the Empire's policy of free trade, which it advocated and put into practice more conscientiously than any other countries. Paradoxically, the acquisition also opened the Empire's door to alien forces. And Count Dracula soon makes his trip to London—with a sinister intention to found his kingdom of the undead rather than to inject the much needed capital into the Empire's economy, though the Count does have plenty of that. This naturally alarms the social elite who

¹² The dehumanization is often caused by the alien environment whose mystical aspects somehow deprive the outsiders of their humanity. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* dwells on a group of British misfits in colonial India. Of the group, Ronny Heaslop is changed from his old liberalist self in England to a "sun-dried bureaucrat" that will not rot in the tropical colony.

¹³ The situation is similar to Kristeva's stranger except that the strangers *en masse* are politically and culturally dominant and their overstays have been extended over generations. They are strangers in their own country, which is soon to become not exactly their own.

fear among other things the contamination of blood amongst the Empire's ladies. As stated before, this fear is understandable as the Empire's subjects become increasingly apprehensive of the inroads of the other. They are shocked by what they encounter out there in the colonies when they are forced to deal with the natives and their seemingly mysterious beliefs, their "outlook" on life or, even worse, when they are waylaid by native immigrants in the inner cities of the Empire.

Stoker's story can thus be read as the Empire's fear of alien contamination (infection by alien blood which is nonetheless human blood) writ large. And since perfectly respectable ladies in London seem to be opening their doors of their own accord for the Count, their male counterparts certainly have good reasons to fear from the vampire's incursions. What is particularly intriguing in the story, however, has to do with the mysterious influence that Dracula wields over his would-be subjects. By contrast, despite all the professionalism of the Crew of Light, including its cosmopolitan composition and the use of modern medical, technological, and managerial know-how, their efforts seem altogether futile. Transfusion fails to replenish Lucy's blood taken by the Count on his nocturnal visits. And her last defense crumples once the traditional talisman of garlic is removed from her room.¹⁴ In the same manner, Mina, Harker's fiancée, is armed with a new-fangled typewriter and is a competent stenographer (Kittler 353-56; Wicke 141-67). She also specializes in assembling all sorts of vital information to help track down the Count's whereabouts. As such, she can be said to embody all that is technological and modern in the Empire's fight against the forces of darkness. Ironically, though, all her modern technologies fail to help capture the vampire. The vampire hunters actually succeed in intercepting Dracula at his castle gate not with the help of their professional knowledge—or, for that matter, Mina's efficient clerical support—but ironically through her "telepathic" ability acquired earlier when she was made to suck the Count's blood in an act of what could be called "reverse vampirism." The Empire and its progress, in other words, leave room for doubt especially when it comes to sustaining imperial domination after the second half of the 19th century.¹⁵ Science and reason are now thought by some to be no match for what is primeval and mythical.

¹⁴ By comparison, the traditional defense seems to be more effective than modern technologies—reflecting somehow the Victorians' doubt over the very idea of progress.

¹⁵ Lyons divides the Protestant positions in Ireland into four phases: settlement, ascendancy, contraction and, finally, siege. Maturin lives during ascendancy whereas Le Fanu is increasingly faced with the prospect of his class undergoing contraction (Sage 81). By Stoker's time, the Protestant domination is evidently about to come to an end.

However, there is another possible reading of the failure. Looked at from a Gothic perspective, the story seems to be suggesting that in the heart of hearts of the modern subject there is a secret yearning for the return of his/her ancient father as an act of empowerment. The ancient father seems to be coming back from a different era with an ethos totally unlike ours. In most cases, the ancient father seems to walk out of the Middle Ages. The medieval may be seen as backward and contrary to what the modern is, but it is also looked forward to paradoxically as a potent means of revitalizing the modern world. Whereas the modern world is preoccupied with trivial and mechanical routines, the medieval is believed to be shrouded in mystery and endowed with a mysterious power. It must be noted, though, that empowerment does not come about without some extraordinary psychical operations. Instead of turning to a bloodline ancestor, a contemporary subject may project his/her anxieties unto an alien progenitor such as the likes of Dracula, who embodies qualities absent from the modern world.

Of special interest is the fact that this projection—from the modern to the medieval and from the same to the other—often comes from the pens of writers from a colonized territory. Or rather, these writers belong neither to the colonizing nor to the colonized. Instead, they hail from in-between groups—in the present context, the Anglo-Irish at the turn of the century. On the surface, they seem to be writing on behalf of their English readers about the fear of Irish virility projected unto a Transylvanian monster. But deep down, they also address themselves to the anxieties of the Anglo-Irish, their compatriots threatened with the prospect of marginalization, even annihilation at the dawn of the Free State's birth. In *Carmilla*, Laura's fear of losing her identity causes her to will the return of Carmilla and her ancestors with similar names. In a way, by allowing herself to be vampirized by her foremothers, the victim may very well be seeking to boost her ethnic purity in her current situation of alienation. But the process is never straightforward; it is in fact unconscious—and openly resisted. And a Gothic turn of mind is actually at work. Gothic texts have often been faulted for their involved textual strategies. Yet, in a different light, such strategies seem indispensable if projections are to be effected. To have a clear picture of the mechanism, a look at an earlier Irish Gothic text, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), will be useful.

The need for revitalization is not a unique *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon (Hurley 5). Charles Maturin's story of Melmoth already enjoyed immense popularity in Europe, judging by, among other things, Balzac's sequel, *Melmoth Reconciled* (1835). Maturin's story follows the classic Gothic model with its convoluted plot, mysterious documents and portraits, and supernatural agents. Its Faustian-*cum*

Wandering-Jew figure is clearly derived rather than original. But what is of particular interest seems to be the return of an ancestral patriarch to a colony now devastated by industrialization.

The junior Melmoth, at the end of his family's "line," is called to his uncle's deathbed. He finds upon arrival that his uncle's estate is lying in near waste and the uncle himself turned into a miser. Before the uncle's death, the junior is instructed to read the mysterious manuscripts in the attic.¹⁶ The document details the tragic history of the ancestor which covers amazingly a wide span of time and space. And it so turns out that in his deal with the devil, the ancestral Melmoth promises to relinquish his soul at the end of a prolonged lifespan (of 150 years) in exchange for supernatural abilities. Apart from a universal yearning for knowledge and power, this can also be read as an allegory of empowerment for the entire Melmoth family amidst the declining state of the Irish nation under colonial rule. Having to eventually forfeit one's soul is not a comforting thought, though, and in the long process of his life, the ancient Melmoth approaches different parties in order to persuade them to trade places with him. These would-be victims are all foreigners, including Stanton, an Englishman. What's most surprising, though, is that Melmoth's descendants are not included on the victims' list.

Temporally, then, this story is Gothic in the sense that the past comes back to haunt the present in a highly graphic manner. The junior Melmoth is instructed by his uncle to destroy a portrait in the attic. (Presumably the subject in the portrait is none other than the ancient Melmoth himself.) But the ancient Melmoth is not to be dismissed with such ease. The stranger appearing at the moment of the uncle's death is none other than the ancient Melmoth himself. One possible Gothic reading of the scene is to interpret the portrait as coming to life to haunt the dying uncle. But a question immediately arises as to why a forefather would want to haunt a dying descendant. To "haunt" means to "come back," often to one's place of origin, to right some wrongs—even to get even with the living. Here the ancient Melmoth returns for a number of reasons, one of them being his concern over the declining state of the family (allegorical of the state of the nation?). Readers might be led to read the episode as the ancient Melmoth's return to have his descendant give up his soul on his behalf. But his descendant does not really qualify as a good candidate as that would amount to foreclosing the lineage. As it turns out at the end of the story,

¹⁶ The Gothic as a genre often achieves its enchantment effect not only through supernatural agency but also as a result of the haunting aspects of textuality. The spectral in some Gothic manuscripts is often believed to defy definition. And textuality is often represented a textual figure that cannot be reduced to the psychical or the real and thus is thought to embody something transcendental (Wolfreys xi).

after all the abortive attempts to trade his place with a variety of third parties, the ancient Melmoth eventually comes home to die just as any wanderer wishes. The dying must yield his place to the younger generation. The return can thus be seen as an attempt to ensure the continuation of the family line which is always at the risk of becoming hybridized and weakened. Le Fanu could very well be concerned with the same issue when he takes up the theme of continuity in the form of a portrait coming back to life, using different anagrams, to haunt her descendants—and in the case of Spieldorf's niece, her fellow compatriots. In both stories, the return serves among other things the function of empowering one's descendants through means that are often unorthodox, even socially transgressive. Unlike normal biological regeneration, the Gothic turn makes it possible for non-contiguous generations to come in contact with each other, very much like different sections of a telescope do. In Ireland's case, the return of an ancient progenitor can perhaps be interpreted as a form of empowerment for a nation struggling under repressive colonial rule and a declining economy.

Diachronically, this return can be seen as that of a national self-identity—a call for the Irish to reaffirm their national consciousness and be a people of heroic action and independent spirit. Spatially, the return invariably comes from abroad. Specifically, the Faustian pact sends our Wandering Jew figure traveling to various parts of the world in search of unsuspecting victims. Admittedly, he fails in his recruitment exercise, and yet his potential subjects invariably fall victim to one social institution or another, including a mental asylum, a convent and, above all, the Spanish Inquisition. These institutions are quite capable of inspiring horror in the nineteenth century—especially from the point of view of an Anglo-Irish Gothic writer. The Englishman Stanton's refusal lands him in Bedlam. Moncada, born out of wedlock, is sent to a monastery in his childhood and made to take a vow against his will. Attempts to free him result in him and his family being sent to the Inquisition. Immalee, again an illegitimate child brought up in a tropical island, is later brought back to the jurisdiction of the Church in Spain. Unwittingly, she falls in love with Melmoth, her one-time mentor. Their tragic love ends in Immalee becoming pregnant with Melmoth's child—for which she is sent to the Inquisition. Strictly speaking, the Spanish Inquisition was not directly under the jurisdiction of the Holy See and had more to do with different royal houses in question, it has been taken all along as a symbol of Catholic persecution. In an allegorical-Gothic sense, this narrative arrangement seems to point to an ironical situation in Ireland. The apprehensions of a Protestant settler, confronted increasingly with Catholic insurgency in the nineteenth century, are projected onto a "foreign" (*alien*) power,

and the Catholic Church is understandably painted in the most “evil” (e.g. vampiric, Transylvanian) terms. In other words, the Anglo-Irish fear of the indigenous Catholic population seems to have been conveniently transferred to a sinister force abroad. The ancient Melmoth is responsible for throwing his victims into either an asylum or, worse, the torture chamber of the Spanish Inquisition. The alien forces embodied in an ancient progenitor thus become immediate when there are brought home. And the invasion of alien forces seems to have reached a climax in Stoker’s handling of the Count’s attempts to launch his kingdom of the undead at the very heart of the Empire (Arata 120).

By sliding the past into the present and the alien into the domestic, Maturin succeeds in not only bringing discrete entities to bear upon each other. He seems to be calling our attention to the potential return of one’s expatriate father in the context of issues that await settlement in our contemporary world. *Melmoth* also speaks to the collective anxieties of modern man about the return of the medieval and alien to the contemporary world. In the Irish context, these Gothic anxieties (about the re-emergence of the medieval and the alien) certainly betray people’s anxieties about the ethnic and religious difficulties confronting any new nation.

The Gothic Return

The Irish Gothic is said to differ from its English counterpart in its “attachment to history and politics” (McCormack 833). Instead of going back to an antiquated age embodying mythical or archetypal dimensions, the Irish Gothic follows a much more complicated path. Centuries of colonial rule have given Ireland’s people a slightly “warped” sense, not only of their nation here and now but also of their history. Punter describes this uniquely “Irish” Gothic in terms of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Present-day conflicts and anxieties are often displaced so that “disputes can be enacted under a different banner, reterritorialized into a phantom of the simulacrum and thus recoded within the supposed logic of a foreign body” (107). The Irish Gothic, in other words, projects its current conflicts onto a *different version* of history—a history shrouded in mist, and plagued with the “impossibilities of transition” (114).

The “impossibilities of transition” seem to be given an additional twist in view of the Anglo-Protestant backgrounds of the Gothic writers mentioned above. Their uniquely in-between, semi-native and semi-stranger status makes the situation all the more complicated as they try to understand their own identity by way of a rear-view glance at their past. Their task “turns Gothic” in a uniquely domestic way.

And the specimens we have examined seem to highlight the special Anglo-Irish anxieties through the return of ancient fathers to their descendants. The descendants look forward, on the one hand, to this return as a possible source of self-empowerment. At the same time, they are still haunted by a past that they cannot quite come to terms with.

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[Received 29 September 2006; accepted 19 January 2007; revised 22 February 2007]