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University Gothic, *c.* 1880–1910

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'University Gothic'?

Writing at the end of the 1990s, Robert Mighall regretted that '[d]iscussions of just where and when a text is set are not prominent' in Gothic studies, 'with critics sometimes explicitly rejecting such concerns', particularly in favour of psychoanalytic readings.[1] Yet, as Fred Botting rightly observes, the Gothic haunts 'particular loci … at the limits of normal worlds and mores' in order to project topical 'cultural fears and fantasies'.[2] Since Mighall's seminal 1999 study of Gothic spatialities, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic*, the loci of Gothic fiction have in fact attracted increased scholarly attention, with the dangerous urban labyrinth of London and the threatening imperial heart of darkness emerging as key fin-de-siècle Gothic sites where modernity clashes with the primitive as is common within the mode. However, in a number of late-Victorian and Edwardian texts belonging to the Gothic tradition, the ancient university town, simultaneously both marginal and central to national life, takes on a distinctly Gothic hue as a site where the latest knowledge mixes with the archaic and where progress, rationality and light give way to darkness, obsession and thirst for power. 'Every institution,' Reba N. Soffer observes, 'and none more than the university, has its confusing layers of secret history and the interior depths are often concealed behind the public façade.'[3] In the diverse body of texts under discussion in this essay, the university town is rendered Gothic by its architecture, secrecy and isolation, by its inhabitants' obsessive pursuit of dangerous knowledge, and by the irony that institutions designed to create gentlemen and promote progress in fact ruin human beings and produce types of knowledge that could be seen as irrational and regressive. It is this tradition of 'University Gothic' that this essay charts.

University men often feature in fin-de-siècle Urban and Imperial Gothic as crazed and exiled doctors. The title characters of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) are two well-known examples of disgraced medical men in canonical Gothic texts, while almost every vampire text from the period features a heroic doctor figure. However, the texts under consideration here are distinguished from these examples of academia-gone-Gothic by their full or partial setting in a university town, which serves to bring the peculiar spatiality of these loci to the forefront. While many of the universities in these texts are given fictional names, they notably resemble the ancient English and Scottish universities rather than the redbrick institutions that began to be established in the nineteenth century. This 'real-and-imaginary' lineage, imbuing the real-life university town with fictional features, disorientates the reader of the Gothic by refusing exact mapping and allows for the troubling return of the past that characterises the Gothic mode.[4] Many examples of fin-de-siècle 'University Gothic' are indebted to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and its eponymous protagonist's quest for unholy knowledge made possible by his learning. Later texts of this tradition include H. Rider Haggard's quest romance *She* (1887), which opens 'at one of the Universities, which for the purposes of this story we will call Cambridge', and Richard Marsh's Gothic science fiction *A Spoiler of Men* (1905), which takes us to two university towns, the imaginary Camford (an inversion of 'Oxbridge') and the real German Heidelberg; in both texts the university – and the learning it enables – fosters unholy quests for potentially dangerous knowledge.[5] In Arthur Conan Doyle's mummy story 'Lot No. 249' (1892), set at 'what we will call Old College in Oxford', as well as many of M. R. James's ghost stories, the first of which were collected in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904), university settings are associated with an

unhealthily obsessive urge to collect that turns against the scholarly hoarder.[6] Perhaps most intriguing of all, however, are texts set in university towns that issued from authors more commonly associated with nineteenth-century realism but in whose 'artistic vision', as Brigitte Hervoche-Bertho writes of Thomas Hardy, the Gothic plays 'a vital part'.[7] The focus of such texts, including Margaret Oliphant's 1896 short story 'The Library Window', set in the fictional Scottish university town of St Rule's (St Andrews), and Thomas Hardy's 1895 novel *Jude the Obscure*, partly set at imaginary Christminster (Oxford), is on the university as a site that resists entry by what were at the time excluded or under-privileged groups: women and the working class.

As Sherry R. Truffin notes in *Schoolhouse Gothic*, the academy functions as 'keeper and purveyor of cultural capital and … site of institutional surveillance and normalizing disciplinary power … that mirrors, justifies, and reproduces prevailing hierarchies … rather than challenging them'.[8] My reading of the spatiality of the fictionalised or entirely imagined university town in fin-de-siècle Gothic draws on Michel Foucault's 'frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent' concept of the heterotopia, a counter-site 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.[9] Heterotopias are 'real places', locatable in the real world, in which time, however, often stands still and which are not accessible to all.[10] Foucault identifies various types of heterotopia, which seem to have incompatible tendencies: 'crisis heterotopias' such as boarding schools or the honeymoon, which house liminal personae; 'heterotopias of deviation' such as prisons and lunatic asylums, which house socially transgressive individuals; heterotopias 'of indefinitely accumulating time' such as museums, libraries and gardens where an attempt is made to store comprehensive knowledge; heterotopias 'of illusion that expose … every real space … as still more illusory', such as brothels, which

challenge the sanctity of the home; and heterotopias 'of compensation' that 'create a space that is … as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled', such as colonies.[11] Heterotopias, Foucault argues, are 'absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about' but 'have a function in relation to' these other sites, either exposing flaws in real spaces or suggesting improvements to them.[12] Thus, the Foucauldian heterotopia may allow an individual to challenge or subvert convention, to undergo transformative experiences, or to create an illusory space where different rules apply or where, as David Harvey argues, individuals may 'carve out … spaces of resistance and freedom … from an otherwise repressive world'.[13] Andrew Thacker similarly describes heterotopias as 'sites of resistance to the dominant ordering of socio-spatiality, found in marginal places and locations', but cautions against seeing them purely as 'sites of absolute freedom or places where marginal groups always resist power'.[14] Indeed, in contrast to such possibilities, Foucauldian heterotopias can also function as carceral or delusional spaces where deviance is contained or fostered, or where attempts are made to produce artificial or coercive order where no order and consensus exist. In this essay, I argue that the universities and university towns of fin-de-siècle Gothic manifest all these seemingly incompatible tendencies: while they are places of opportunity, learning and aspiration, their exclusivity nonetheless renders them inaccessible to outsiders while their privileged residents exist aloof from the real world, indulging in dangerous daydreams and experiments. If the Gothic mode typically undermines modern ideals of rationality and progress, 'University Gothic' reveals places of supposed learning not to be places of Enlightenment – encapsulating 'both reason and visibility' – at all but instead places of darkness where human beings are ruined.[15]

'Indistinct in the twilight': The Idea of the University

Unlike the metropolitan centre that is the most typical setting of fin-de-siècle Gothic fiction, the Gothic university town exists on the margins of British society and represents something of an enigma. A site of uncertain expectations, the margin also represents opportunity. For those who are not of the university, the place of learning is initially seen 'indistinct in the twilight' and strikes the beholder with the force of a vision as a desirable utopia.[16] In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, the university town of Christminster exists on the very margins of Hardy's fictional world, the anachronistic 'partly real, partly dream-country' of Wessex: as Hardy puts it, Christminster is situated 'within hail of the Wessex border, and almost with the tip of one small toe within it'.[17] The eponymous working-class protagonist first contemplates this distant town in Upper Wessex from a hilltop near his native village of Marygreen. As Jude gazes over the intervening plain at nightfall, the 'thinning mist dissolve[s]' to reveal 'the vanes, windows, wet roof slates, and other shining spots upon the spires, domes, freestone-work, and varied outlines' of the 'gorgeous city', and Jude seems to hear 'the voice of the city' announcing, '"We are happy here!"'[18] This 'wonderful city for scholarship and religion', a 'city of light', a veritable 'new Jerusalem', becomes Jude's goal, and he records his 'fervid desires to behold Christminster' by carving his intentions on the milestone pointing the way: 'THITHER.'[19] While this 'vague city' develops a romanticised 'tangibility, a permanence, and hold on [Jude's] life', Hardy indicates early on that it may be but a 'mirag[e] in the peculiar atmosphere' of the evening, when even Jude's immediate surroundings 'put on the hues and shapes of chimaeras'.[20]

Hardy's novel is seldom studied as an example of the Gothic mode. However, this story of a stonemason's quest for a foothold in learned Christminster shares a certain Gothic atmosphere as well as its themes of over-reaching, social exclusion and ultimate ruination of the human subject with a range of contemporary texts that are unquestionably Gothic. The

visionary quality that characterises Jude's initial sighting of the distant university town is particularly strong in Margaret Oliphant's 1896 ghost story 'The Library Window', according to Elizabeth Jay 'at once the most accomplished and least self-indulgent account of the woman writer's predicament that Mrs Oliphant ever produced'.[21] The story's nameless adolescent female narrator is, like Jude, barred from a scholarly life that she can vaguely see but is unable to enter. The story details the fascination of the bookish narrator, recuperating from an unspecified illness at her aunt's house in the ancient Scottish university town of St Rule's, with the strangely 'opaque' window of the university library that overlooks her aunt's house.[22] During luminous June evenings, when 'it is daylight, yet it is not day', the window clears to reveal to the narrator, ensconced in the 'refuge' of the 'deep recess' of her aunt's 'drawing-room window', a scholar's room and, eventually, a man, who recalls her absent father, working tirelessly at his desk.[23] At the story's conclusion, the narrator both learns that the window is but 'an optical illusion', a *trompe-l'oeil*, and witnesses the scholar, apparently the ghost of the murdered lover of one of her ancestors, open it 'with a noise that was heard from the West Port to the Abbey' to acknowledge her presence – or could it possibly be to wave her away?[24] Like Jude's first ethereal glimpses of Christminster, the narrator's vision of the tempting library window is illuminated by the twilight of the northern midsummer, 'the light without shadows' with 'a spell in it', which matches the narrator's liminal position as a visitor to St Rule's; between childhood and adulthood; seated in her window between the public and the private spheres; perceiving the world through what she terms a 'second-sight' but treated by others as a 'fantastic and fanciful and dreamy' creature suffering from adolescent hysteria.[25] The few scholarly analyses of this masterful story of the seen and the unseen, as Oliphant termed her supernatural fiction, tend to approach it as an allegory of the woman writer's limited career and educational opportunities in the nineteenth century – a situation with which Oliphant herself was painfully familiar – the 'feeling of space' behind

the apparent window as deceptive as Jude's enraptured vision of Christminster because it is eventually found to be an unreal fantasy.[26]

The Gothic mode commonly plays with the terrors brought about by lack of light and impaired visibility. In the University Gothic of Hardy and Oliphant, the hold of the university upon the impressionable imagination is at its most powerful at twilight, a time of transformation, when the *genius loci* of the university town is strongly felt. Obsessed with the 'curious and cunning glamour' of Christminster, Jude moves to put his 'magnificent Christminster dream' into practice, entering Christminster as an unknown Gothic stonemason at nightfall.[27] The town, with its distinctly Gothic architecture, appears haunted by its history, the ghosts of its former scholars seeming to flit around Jude as he himself 'haunt[s] the cloisters and quadrangles of the colleges', ghostlike:[28]

> [S]eeming thus almost his own ghost, [Jude] gave his thoughts to the other ghostly presences with which the nooks were haunted … The brushing[s] of the wind against the angles, buttresses, and door-jambs were as the passing of these only other inhabitants, the tappings of each ivy leaf on its neighbour were as the mutterings of their mournful souls, the shadows as their thin shapes in nervous movement, making him comrades in his solitude. In the gloom it was as if he ran against them without feeling their bodily frames … Jude found himself speaking out loud, holding conversations with them as it were.[29]

While the very air of Christminster appears to Jude populated by benevolent ghosts, the expected utopia is in doubt from the beginning as Jude contemplates the crumbling architecture of this 'ecclesiastical romance in stone'.[30] Ominously, soon after his arrival in

Christminster, Jude begins to feel his isolation and friendlessness to such an extent that he feels like 'a self-spectre … who walked but could not make himself seen or heard', and in the eyes of the scholars he will in fact prove as invisible as a phantom.[31] In Oliphant's similarly poignant commentary on underprivileged groups' lack of access to university education, the protagonist of 'The Library Window' grows pale and ghostlike as she becomes obsessed with the spectral scholar's study across the street. The Gothic university renders outsiders immaterial.

The Gothic mode is, of course, associated with certain types of hostile spatiality that are archaic, claustrophobic or otherwise somehow threatening, and the university itself, 'described as a necropolis' as Hervoche-Bertho observes of Hardy's novel, assumes vampiric qualities that appear to draw and drain the would-be scholar and entrap him or her as a hopeless haunter of the locus of learning.[32] Jude is initially surprised to find that 'modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers', the colleges' 'extinct air being accentuated by the rottenness of the stones' and the 'dark corners' and 'shadows' of the town.[33] The tomb-like colleges, one of which is even given the fictional name of Sarcophagus College, are described as 'the carcases that contained the scholar souls':[34]

> [S]ome were pompous; some had put on the look of family vaults above ground; something barbaric loomed in the masonries of all … The condition of several moved him as he would have been moved by maimed sentient beings. They were wounded, broken, sloughing off their outer shape in the deadly struggle against years, weather, and man.[35]

As Kelly Hurley notes, the 'minus narrative' of late-nineteenth-century degeneration theory is 'a "gothic" discourse' that imagines a negative regression rather than a positive evolution towards a better future.[36] Hardy extends this evolutionary decline to Christminster, the centre of national learning, which appears a degenerate entity that is slowly dying, damaged beyond repair despite Jude's dignified efforts as a stonemason to check its decay. University Gothic shares this architectural decrepitude with the London-based 'modern Gothic', and in this tradition, too, Gothic rot also affects the seemingly cultured minds and scholarly pursuits of those living within the dilapidated Colleges.[37]

'Seekers after knowledge': Inside the University

The ancient universities and the role played by scholars were in fact the subject of intense national debate and relatively unsuccessful attempts at reform throughout the nineteenth century.[38] As Frank M. Turner notes, the liberal education the universities provided was intended to train a national and imperial elite with the 'particular expansion of outlook, turn of mind, habit of thought, and capacity for social and civic interaction' associated with that elusive 'person of broad knowledge, critical intelligence, moral decency, and social sensitivity' known as 'the Gentleman'.[39] However, as Soffer observes, the 'ancient universities, with their well-deserved reputations for sloth and isolation, became conspicuous targets' for reformers who felt that more practical and professional training was needed to maintain Britain's competitiveness.[40] In 'agreement about the need to preserve traditions', the universities, however, resisted reform by attempting 'to preempt and control changes that might otherwise have been forced upon them', in fact conserving the past and bygone modes of thought when they were charged with providing for the future.[41] Thus, *The Times* had earlier in the century described Oxford as 'the seat of isolated barbarism amongst an ocean of wholesome knowledge and of useful action' that is 'generations behind the rest of the

kingdom, and fitter to sympathize with the monks of the Escurial than with a free and reflecting people'.[42] In keeping with such assessments, 'University Gothic' suggests that the 'barbaric', 'decrepit and superseded' 'rottenness' of the university does not in fact foster modern, progressive thinkers but drunken, womanising and Latinless undergraduates, degenerate gentlemen harbouring monstrous dual identities, and bigoted dons whose 'blood-red robes' point to a fundamental barbarity at the heart of university life.[43]

As Soffer notes, the university was 'a closed community purposefully segregated from' and 'protected against intrusion from the outside world'.[44] Until well into the twentieth century, this 'intellectual aristocracy' represented 'a small, interrelated, and self-perpetuating caste', an 'almost exclusively male, quasi-monastic communit[y]' drawn 'from the upper and, increasingly, from the upwardly mobile middle classes'.[45] In University Gothic, this monastic tendency facilitates the gathering of dangerous knowledge for personal gain that grants its possessor excessive levels of power. An institution designed to benefit the nation, the university is instead seen to foster secrecy and deviance, the physical appearance of the scholars often strongly hinting at their (moral) degeneracy. In Richard Marsh's Gothic science-fiction novel *A Spoiler of Men*, for example, the anti-hero Cyril Wentworth's academic uncle, Professor Hammond Hurle of St Clement's College, Camford, is 'a pathetic little figure of helplessness', a 'minute', 'delicate' and 'emasculate' man who can only survive within the walls of 'the pleasantest college in the university of Camford'.[46] Hurle's degeneracy is confirmed by his stationary life:

> He had been a bookworm all his life … He had never even travelled … It was
> credibly reported that for nearly forty years he had never journeyed more than ten
> miles from St. Clement's College, with the exception of a short annual visit which he

made to London, during which practically the whole of his time was spent in the British Museum.[47]

Sticking to his College like a mollusc to its stone, the parasitic 'bookworm' Hurle may be 'one of the greatest Greek scholars living' but he is 'not … exactly a wise man, in spite of his scholarship', as evidenced by his 'partiality for dabbling in … the occult sciences'.[48] Though physically strong and intellectually capable, the Cambridge don Ludwig Horace Holly, the scholarly narrator of H. Rider Haggard's quest romance *She*, is described in similarly degenerate terms as a 'shortish, rather bow-legged, very deep chested' throwback 'with unusually long arms' and 'dark hair and small eyes' who is keenly aware of his 'physical deficiencies' and feels himself 'branded', preferring to live in 'misanthropic and sullen' solitude in his College until his only friend charges him with the upbringing of his son Leo Vincey.[49] In keeping with contemporary scientific distrust over any deviations from the norm, University Gothic repeatedly represents the university as a site that might harbour and even cherish morbid life forms within its protective walls.

While Jude and Oliphant's nameless narrator are outsiders who initially romanticise the distant or unknown university town, many traditionally Gothic texts situate unholy quests for knowledge and power by grotesque scholars at the heart of university life. As Truffin notes, in such texts the civilised self disintegrates in keeping with the modern Gothic's fascination with duality, and new, monstrous creatures emerge from educational establishments as a result of dangerous experiments with knowledge.[50] Ironically, this Gothic theme was not in fact borne out by nineteenth-century academic reality, which at the ancient universities was often less concerned with scientific discovery than the maintenance of the status quo. According to Soffer, while the college system allowed tutors 'concentrated

authority over their students', many 'college teachers did little original research' and few 'attempted to discover or master a special, unexplored subject … because college teachers generally were too overburdened with personal supervision of students, teaching, and examining to attempt original research'.[51] The monstrous over-reaching scholar is, therefore, a Gothic concoction.

Nonetheless, unholy quests for knowledge and power, attempts to subvert progress, rationality and morality, and debates over scholarly responsibility form the stock-in-trade of many University Gothic texts. In Marsh's novel, for example, the anti-hero Cyril Wentworth, a former star Chemistry student at the German University of Heidelberg, uses his knowledge to transform his enemies into mindless but obedient zombies, acquiring the nickname 'Jack the Chemist' during his travels. Wentworth's erstwhile mentor at Heidelberg, Professor Ehrenberg, is 'the greatest chemist the world had ever seen', with an 'almost unholy' knowledge of his subject, who admits that in Wentworth, with his 'insatiable' 'thirst for knowledge', he 'had taken a devil into [his] laboratory'.[52] A rare responsible scholar in Gothic fiction, Ehrenberg has subsequently laboured hard to produce an antidote to Wentworth's concoctions, accepting his responsibility as an educator. In Haggard's *She*, a dramatic midnight visit from a dying friend leads the Cambridge don Ludwig Horace Holly to accept the responsibility for the upbringing of a young male ward who is destined to embark on a dangerous occult quest for the immortal white African queen Ayesha. Similarly, many of M. R. James's ghost stories have their premises in the scholarly world of university tutors, whose academic interests follow them even on holiday, when their researches typically unearth dangerous forces that these supposed experts are in fact unable to control. As Penny Fielding argues, James's stories may operate within a 'comfortable world of … antiquarians and historians' but this is also 'a world in which the antiquarian past returns to trouble a

fragile and alienated sense of modern life' so that 'the empty spaces of James's antiquarian heroes become haunted by the very fears about modern life that they seek to avoid'.[53]

If the university town is geographically marginal and many of its denizens stationary, it is nonetheless not entirely unconnected to the outside world. While Oliphant and Hardy bring outsiders into the university town, the quests that occupy James's obsessive antiquarians and Haggard's protagonists take them away from the university and often out of Britain itself. In Arthur Conan Doyle's mummy story 'Lot No. 249', scholarly pursuits in other parts of the world return to haunt the cradle of learning, a fictionalised Oxford. The story, strongly influenced by *Frankenstein*, follows 'a singular chain of events' that suggests that 'the path of nature has been overstepped in open day in so famed a centre of learning and light as the University of Oxford'.[54] The events unfold with temporal specificity in May 1884 in a notably vaguely situated 'corner turret of an exceeding great age' in 'a certain wing' of the fictional 'Old College', which is described in overtly Gothic tones as crumbling, 'grey, lichen-blotched' and 'bound and knitted together with withes and strands of ivy'.[55] The turret's three secluded chambers, connected by 'steps … shapeless and hollowed by the tread of so many generations of the seekers after knowledge', are inhabited, at the top, by the 'manly and robust' Abercrombie Smith; in the middle, the 'damnable', 'reptilian' 'evil liver' Edward Bellingham who is however 'a demon at' 'Eastern languages'; and, on the lowest floor, William Monkhouse Lee, the least ambitious of the three.[56] One night, the midnight anatomical studies of the protagonist Smith are interrupted by a 'sudden, uncontrollable shriek of horror' from Bellingham's chambers, which, to his astonishment, Smith finds to resemble 'a museum rather than a study': the room is full of Egyptian antiquities, most notably a mummy case containing 'a horrid, black, withered' but gigantic occupant with 'a suggestion of energy', 'a lurid spark of vitality' in its being.[57] Bellingham himself, who has

fallen into a fit, has come to resemble the mummies which are his special study, his skin

hanging 'loosely in creases and folds … shot with a meshwork of wrinkles'.[58] Bellingham,

who 'knows more about [mummies] than any man in England', explains that he has been

enjoying a 'little midnight gam[e]' with his specimen, now reduced to a nameless

archaeological 'lot', having been in life 'a noble at the least'.[59]

Though 'palpitating with fear', Bellingham also betrays 'a suspicion of triumph' in

his bearing.[60] His 'wide reading' and 'extraordinary memory' are, nonetheless, not enough to

hide the 'dash of insanity' that characterises his wild talk of being able to 'command powers

of good and of evil', marking him as yet another deviant scholar, and the morally upright

Smith is therefore not tempted by his offers of partnership in the unspecified gamble on

which he is about to venture.[61] Smith's suspicions towards his neighbour are further

strengthened by the 'low, muffled monologue' he can hear from Bellingham's chambers late

at night and by the audible steps of a mysterious visitor, who passes unseen on the dark spiral

staircase.[62] Soon rumours sweep the university of assaults against Bellingham's enemies by a

strong, agile and sinuous attacker who seems 'not human', these attacks coinciding with the

unexpected disappearances and reappearances of the supposedly inanimate mummy from its

case in Bellingham's chambers.[63] As Smith begins to look into 'the little mystery which hung

round his chambers', he comes to suspect that Bellingham, with his 'malignant passion',

might in fact be 'a dangerous neighbour' engaged on the 'black business' of producing 'a

weapon such as no man had ever used in all the grim history of crime': a reanimated

mummy.[64] This 'monstrous', 'fantastic conjecture' 'entirely beyond all bounds of human

experience' is proven correct when Bellingham, 'like some bloated spider fresh from the

weaving of his poisonous web', sets the mummy to attack Smith.[65] Having come 'within

hand-grip of the devil', Smith forsakes his scholarly identity to assume the position of an

adventure hero familiar from Haggard's novels, loads himself with weapons, and forces his fellow student to dismember and burn the mummy and the scroll containing the instructions for its resuscitation.[66] While Bellingham subsequently disappears into the Sudan on the eve of the Mahdist uprising, the story concludes on a note of caution about the unholy quests for knowledge that university life might facilitate. Fellow scholars, it is implied, might make dangerous neighbours. Unlike Frankenstein, Bellingham does not lose control of his creature but is made to reduce it first to parts and then to ashes. The specificity with which the story is set in time, however, suggests that he may have found an alternative outlet for his powers in the Sudan.

In each of these stories, the seemingly isolated university setting with the opportunities it affords for the search for archaic knowledge acts as a heterotopia in which scholars are able to experiment with time, mortality and power. The stories also offer commentaries on the outside world in keeping with Foucault's contention that heterotopias are always related to the real world: Marsh's science fiction can be read as a discussion of the permeability and instability of human identity; Haggard's quest romance articulates anxieties about mortality, the longevity of Queen Victoria's Empire and changing gender roles; James's ghost stories obliquely address questions related to personal relations, homoerotic attachments and scholarly obsessions; and Doyle's mummy story voices doubt over the security and justice of imperial possession and raises the possibility of imperial guilt. The university's simultaneous location as the geographical margin *and* the intellectual centre of national life, together with its scholarly seclusion and the access to a world of books, objects and facilities it provides, allows the university to act as a heterotopia that masks current anxieties, houses deviant types 'often without any experience of the outside world', and produces an illusion of scholarly order in a rapidly changing world.[67]

'Only a wall – but what a wall!': Exclusion from the University

Indeed, the university town is found in each text to be a peculiar spatial vacuum that not only enables the continued existence of deviant scholars but also resists the arrival or acceptance of outsiders, even driving them to utter ruination. The exclusion of women from scholarly life is the central theme of Oliphant's 'The Library Window', the story's 'bookish concerns' typical of Oliphant's obsession with 'images of reading and writing'.[68] Despite her feminine spiritual progeneracy, a 'superiority' or 'clearness' of sight, the nameless narrator is in the end unable to access the scholar's study in the university library of St Rule's.[69] Oliphant's narrator attends a ball within the very library that so fascinates her, only to become embarrassingly upset that her vision of the scholar's study turns out to be but a pitiful 'dream', and she momentarily entertains 'wild dreams' of climbing up to the illusory window to force her way in.[70] As Jenni Calder rightly notes, the library 'window may suggest opportunities of looking out into another, bigger world, but it is only an illusion of opportunity. You can *see* through glass, but not move through it.'[71] Tamar Heller reads in the narrator's tale of her failure to enter the scholarly life 'an overwhelming sense of secondariness' that represents through the Gothic mode what Calder identities as Oliphant's 'consistent preoccupation' with 'the constraint of women's lives and their exclusion from professional and political activity' and with 'women's chances of finding … a "sphere" in which to operate with some degree of satisfaction if not with complete fulfilment'.[72] 'It is a longing all your life after – it is a looking – for what never comes', the story bleakly concludes.[73]

Jude, similarly, finds that Christminster extends a 'freezing negative' to individuals from his social background, no matter how 'crazy for books' they might be.[74] Those

'strongholds of learning', the medieval Colleges, turn out to be just that, resistant to outsiders and protective of the 'lofty level' of the scholars they harbour.[75] In his temporary lodgings in the suggestively named Mildew Lane, 'a narrow lane close to the back of [Sarcophagus College], but having no communication with it', Jude finds himself divided from his 'happy young contemporaries … who had nothing to do from morning till night but to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' by '[o]nly a wall – but what a wall!'[76] The university casts a deadly shadow of 'gloom, bigotry, and decay' over town life, the 'little houses … darkened to gloom by the high collegiate buildings, within which life was so far removed from that of the people in the lane as if it had been on opposite sides of the globe; yet only a thickness of wall divided them'.[77] It is in this 'depressing purlieu' that Little Father Time hangs his siblings and himself after reacting with horror to Christminster's Commemoration Day ceremony and concluding that the colleges must be 'gaols'.[78] On the following Commemoration Day Jude himself will die alone, having again seen the Christminster 'phantoms … in the college archways, and windows', but this time he decides that they are 'laughing at' him.[79] This bitter conclusion appears justified as the town's 'bells str[ike] out joyously' as a final insult to his wasted life.[80] His parting words – 'when I'm dead, you'll see my spirit flitting up and down here among these!' – read like a curse.[81]

For Jude and for Oliphant's narrator, the vaguely glimpsed academic utopia eventually turns into a blank wall as the crisis heterotopia of the university institution keeps the world out. While female students had been admitted to special women's colleges at Cambridge from 1869 and at Oxford from 1879, neither institution allowed them equal status with male students until well into the twentieth century; and, as Soffer notes, it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that working-class students began to find their way into the universities in significant numbers, 'social, economic and political reality

continu[ing] to give power to those individuals who already had privileges and opportunities'.[82] In fin-de-siècle University Gothic, then, the university appears as 'a place of mystified power and privilege … defined as much by what and whom it excludes as by what and whom it embraces'.[83] University education is not available to all, though it may appear to be within reach, or just across the street, as in Hardy's and Oliphant's texts, in which two underprivileged groups – the working class and women – dream of a scholarly existence that is eventually denied them. This exclusive closed world that appears to be designed to facilitate human progress and the study of the 'best that has been thought and said' also leads to abhuman degradation in the texts as obsessive scholars' ambitious quests for intellectual advance result in dangerous over-reaching and the destruction of human identity. Fin-de-siècle 'University Gothic' therefore interrogates the spaces, guardians and very tenets of university education at a time when the university as an institution was undergoing extensive scrutiny and was often attacked as archaic and stagnant. Ultimately, then, the ancient university town stands for the ambivalence – or obscurity, to borrow from the title of Hardy's novel – of modernity, articulated in spatial and architectural terms, in the Gothic fiction of the period: a tempting but archaic Gothic world only open to the select, the university is the site of intellectual enquiry, ambition and over-reaching in a period that witnessed significant anxiety over the condition of the nation.

Notes

1   Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xi.

2   Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 20.

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