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Richard Marsh, *The Goddess: A Demon*

Edited by Minna Vuohelainen

Introduction

By Minna Vuohelainen

Richard Marsh, professional author

In November 1900, an article in the high-culture review *Academy* considered the rising fortunes of what its anonymous author termed the “Yarning School.” Characterized by the “faculty of beginning a story anywhere and continuing without art or insight, but with reckless invention,” the Yarning School was responsible for “romances which will beguile a railway journey, or even form the stay-at-home pabulum of millions.” While reluctantly admitting “the innate genius for telling a story” which defined the Yarning School to be “a fine gift,” the reviewer regretfully concluded that “these are fat years for the yarners.” The writer attributed their success to the millions of new readers who had entered the market in the years following the 1870 Education Act and were demanding cheap, light reading. These readers were the target audience of the Yarning School, for “it is precisely the prevalence of shallow learning that multiplies novelists and ensures readers. [...] [T]housands [...] are satisfied [...] with] the crude literary fare which is supplied to them so lavishly.”

The author of the indignant exposé of the Yarning School was not afraid of naming names. Among the Yarners named and shamed were Guy Boothby, William Le Queux, Fergus Hume, Hume Nisbet, and George Manville Fenn, all writers of fair popularity. Above all, however,

There is Mr. Richard Marsh: he is prodigious. The tradition current in the receiving department of this office that he publishes a new novel every Tuesday is an exaggeration. We do not believe that, working at top pressure, Mr. Marsh writes one novel a month. But [...] he comes near to this figure.

In “a year of unexampled depression in the book trade,” the writer states, “Mr Marsh has got into his stride and he throws off a story with an abandon—we might add, an

abandonment—that is refreshing.” Among the popular texts torn apart by the reviewer was Marsh’s gothic novel *The Goddess: A Demon*, which, the reviewer notes, “relies on [its] sub-title to secure immediate attention to certain weird happenings in Imperial-mansions.” The critic scornfully suggests that such “delectable plot[lines] probably flashed upon Mr. Marsh while his ticket was being punched on the top of a ’bus,” and goes on to quote the *dénouement* to *The Goddess*, stating that “The public who will accept the solution of this story will accept anything.” *The Goddess*, he observes, “is scrumptious dormitory yarning; but is it anything else?” Nonetheless, the reviewer is forced to admit that “Mr. Marsh is [...] on terms with his readers; for him the rest is mechanics, and for them it is excitement.”¹

The conservative review of the fiction produced by the “Yarners” was published in 1900, Marsh’s *anno mirabilis*. Since 1897, Marsh had steadily built on the promise of his bestseller, *The Beetle: A Mystery*, culminating in an impressive show of energy in 1900, a year in which he did indeed come near to producing one novel a month with his eight volumes of fiction, totaling over half a million words. In 1901, Marsh defended his production rates in a letter to the *Academy*:

During the last year or two work of mine which appeared in print twelve years ago has been brought out as new. The impression has consequently grown up that I flood the market with books turned out by machinery. As a matter of fact, since I finished *The Beetle* in the spring of 1896, I have not written, on an average, one novel a year. An author can have no reasonable objection to the production of fresh editions of his books, but he has every right to protest against his old work being issued by owners of copyright as if it were new.²

Marsh had earlier explained that “Simultaneous publication is not equivalent to simultaneous production. [...] I assure you I had no wish that my books should be treading on each other’s heels.” In fact, Marsh claimed, it was his custom to “produce slowly. Kneading a story, mentally, is a delight, setting it forth on paper is about as bad as a surgical operation.”³ In 1900 Marsh did come dangerously close to flooding

¹ “The Yarning School,” *Academy* 59 (3 November 1900): 423-24.

² “Mr. Richard Marsh’s Stories,” *Academy* 60 (9 February 1901): 131.

³ “Mr Marsh Explains,” *Academy* 52 (30 October 1897): 358.

the market. However, his eight volumes – which included gothic and supernatural fiction, a novel of stage life, an episodic narrative in which Christ returns to contemporary London, a schoolboy adventure, and detective and mystery stories – also guaranteed him plenty of attention and many readers. After 1900, Marsh's reputation as a popular author was firmly established, his production levels stabilized at three volumes a year, and reviews of his work became increasingly appreciative of the craftsmanship and innovativeness displayed in his novels.

Marsh's career was intimately connected to the conditions which characterized the turn of the century, a potential golden age for the popular novelist. This transitional period in British print culture witnessed a number of significant developments: beneficial changes in taxation, the introduction of cheaper and quicker printing methods, advances in distribution and communication, the emergence of magazines specializing in fiction, increasingly aggressive marketing, the introduction of state education and, consequently, near-universal literacy amongst the urban lower middle classes. From the 1880s, the publishing industry responded to the challenge of catering for these newly-literate consumers by providing them with cheap, light reading, particularly fiction, in the shape of the six-shilling one-volume first edition, weekly penny papers such as *Tit-Bits* and *Answers*, and sixpenny illustrated monthlies such as *Strand*, *Windsor*, and *Idler*.⁴ This new audience, it was acknowledged, consisted of working men and women who had had limited educational opportunities and now had limited leisure time. This, Helen Bosanquet argued in the conservative *Contemporary Review*, was “a tired public, craving to forget its weariness, and eagerly seizing upon any mental distraction which will help.” As Bosanquet contemptuously recognized, peculiar qualities were required of writers catering for the newly literate:

[A]uthors who are to fulfil this function must write under very difficult conditions. For one thing, they cannot look for more than the minimum of intellectual exertion on the part of their readers [...]. Indeed, it is doubtful how

⁴ Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*. 2nd edn (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 306-17; Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 3-25.

far the necessary concentration is possible in the detached and interrupted moments which they can give. In the second place, the physical conditions under which the stories are to be read involve a style which must be difficult to acquire, and very difficult to handle well. [...] [T]he story must march straight to its end with as little impedimenta as possible. [...] The conditions of the stories are, then, that they must be interesting, easily read, concise, and purely narrative.⁵

Newly literate workers, reading fiction on the public transport and after work, “prefer[red] to be excited and interested,” one writer asserted in the veteran *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, “Hence the popularity of the sensational novel, taking horrors for its subjects and criminals for its heroes, and leading the reader onwards from surprise to surprise to the dramatic *dénouement* which should be enveloped in mystery.”⁶

Marsh’s career can be seen as a continuous attempt to provide “interesting, easily read, concise, and purely narrative” fiction for readers who “prefer[red] to be excited and interested.” From the time that the first work attributed to “Richard Marsh” appeared in *Belgravia* in 1888, Marsh accurately gauged the mood and tastes of the fin-de-siècle public. His early work mostly falls into the gothic and crime genres, but by the end of the century, he had branched out into the sensation, thriller, and romance genres which were to remain his standard fare from then on. Apart from 76 volumes issued by 16 different publishers, Marsh published short and serial fiction in a number of magazines, including *Belgravia*, *Household Words*, *Cornhill Magazine*, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, *Home Chimes*, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, *Longman’s Magazine*, *All the Year Round*, *Answers*, *Idler Magazine*, *Harmsworth Magazine* (later *London Magazine*), *Pearson’s Weekly*, *Pearson’s Magazine*, *Windsor Magazine*, *Cassell’s Magazine*, and, most importantly, *Strand Magazine*. As noted below, he also issued short stories and serial novels in the regional newspaper press, for example the *Manchester Weekly Times* where *The Goddess* was serialized. Marsh was clearly aware of current developments in publishing and tailored his literary production to suit a growing but increasingly diversified market of lower-middle-class

⁵ Helen Bosanquet, “Cheap Literature,” *Contemporary Review* 79 (1901): 674-75.

⁶ “Crime in Fiction,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 148 (August 1890): 172.

and female readers. Among them, he built up a solid reputation as a provider of entertaining and up-to-date popular fiction.

Bernard Heldmann, *alias* “Richard Marsh”

So who was “Richard Marsh,” this “universal literary provider?”⁷ Marsh was born Richard Bernard Heldmann in London on 12 October, 1857. His father, lace merchant Joseph Heldmann, was of German Jewish origin, and his mother Emma, née Marsh, was a lace-manufacturer’s daughter from Nottinghamshire. Bernard (his preferred name), or “Bertie,” was born just before his father became embroiled in bankruptcy proceedings which revealed that he had been defrauding his employers, who also happened to be his in-laws, to the tune of £16,000 by selling goods below cost value. His career as lace merchant over, Joseph Heldmann took to private tutoring, teaching German, English Literature and the Classics at various London schools before running his own school in Hammersmith, West London. The Heldmanns had at least three further children: Henry (Harry, 1858-1932); Sophia Alice (Alice, 1860-1938); and John Whitworth, who died in his infancy (1870-71).

Young Bernard appears to have taken after his father in his unscrupulousness. His grandson Robert Aickman, himself a fine gothic author, states that Heldmann was expelled from Eton and Oxford (though there is no evidence that he attended either) “owing to incidents with women,”⁸ and implies that his lifestyle was unconventional and flashy. By 1880, Heldmann had deserted his family background in trade and education for journalism, then a semi-intellectual career on the borders of respectable society. He first began to publish fiction under his given name at the youthful age of 22 in the devotional publications *Quiver* and *Young England* and the boys’ paper *Union Jack*. The weekly *Union Jack*, associated with two favorite boys’ writers of the time, W.H.G. Kingston (1814-80) and G.A. Henty (1832-1902), provided Heldmann with his initiation into the literary life. Under Henty’s editorship, he quickly became a trusted contributor of short and serial school and adventure stories before being promoted to co-editor in October 1882. However, in spring 1883 Heldmann’s contribution to the paper began to flag, the serial he was publishing was interrupted in

⁷ Robert Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), 11.

⁸ Aickman, *Attempted Rescue*, 11.

March, and his editorship was abruptly terminated by Henty in June. Speculation has long surrounded the abrupt end to Heldmann's career in spring 1883. While the exact circumstances of Heldmann's breach with Henty remain unclear, a partial record of his activities in the aftermath of his dismissal in 1883 can now be offered.⁹ However, while we now know the reason for the gap in his literary production in the mid-1880s and for his subsequent adoption of the pseudonym "Richard Marsh" in 1888, it must be stressed that we still have no information on what caused Heldmann's journalistic career to falter in early spring 1883: did he suffer a nervous breakdown? Did he get into debt? Were women involved? Or did he steal from Henty?

On 12 February, 1884, the Cardiff *Western Mail* reported on the capture of a forger at the seaside town of Tenby in South Wales: "On Saturday night the Tenby police succeeded in capturing a person who has been for some time wanted in connection with the frauds on the Acton Branch of the London and North-Western Bank," the paper reported: "The name of the person is Bernard Heldman, *alias* Captain Roberts, *alias* Dr. Wilson. He is described as a journalist, and formerly of Acton; and is required at Tunbridge Wells in connection with several frauds on the above bank."¹⁰ The *Kent and Sussex Courier and Southern Counties Herald* supplies further detail on the charges at Tunbridge Wells:

Bernard Heldmann, alias Capt. George Roberts, a journalist, pleaded guilty to two indictments charging him with having, at Tunbridge Wells, obtained by false pretences from Emma Thrift food and lodgings, value £3, with intent to defraud.—Mr. Stone, who prosecuted, said that the prisoner went to the house of Mrs. Thrift and obtained board and lodging, representing himself to be Capt. Roberts. Whilst he was staying there he went to Mr. Oliver, a butcher, to pay for something he had there, giving him a cheque for £15, here also

⁹ See also Minna Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh: Victorian Fiction Research Guide* 35 (October 2009), <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/arts-humanities/Media/victorian-research-fiction/StockList/35-Richard-Marsh.aspx>; Callum James, "Callum James's Literary Detective Agency, Case #1: Why Was Richard Marsh?," *Front Free Endpaper*, 30 November 2009, <http://callumjames.blogspot.com/2009/11/callum-james-literary-detective-agency.html>; Robert Kirkpatrick, *The Three Lives of Bernard Heldmann* (London: Children's Books History Society, 2010)

¹⁰ "Capture of a Forger at Tenby," *Western Mail*, 12 February 1884, 4.

representing himself as Capt. Roberts. When the cheque was presented it was dishonoured.¹¹

Heldmann was, accordingly, sentenced to eighteen months' hard labor at the West Kent Quarter Sessions on 9 April, 1884 for obtaining board and lodgings ("food pudding tea coals") by false pretences from Emma Thrift, and for obtaining money (£10 15s.) by false pretences from William Oliver.¹² He served his sentence in full at Maidstone Jail, which can now be identified as the original of Marsh's fictional Canterstone Jail, and was released on 8 October, 1885. The Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll tells us that he was considered well-educated, declared his occupation as journalist, had brown hair, and was 5 foot 5 inches tall.¹³

These, then, are the facts of the case. However, the press reportage can also give us an insight into Heldmann's mindset and self-fashioning. The case revolved around fraud and Heldmann's careless financial dealings:

Mr Stone, who prosecuted, said that the prisoner [...] had obtained from the bank a cheque book in the name of his brother, and drew cheques to a large amount, which were all dishonoured.—Mr. Dickens, for the defence, said the prisoner did not get the cheque book in his brother's name but in his own, as he had a sum of from £300 to £400 in the bank, but he considerably overdrew, thinking that he would have some money paid into his account.¹⁴

Indeed, Arthur Charles Bocking, also referred to as Brocking, "a bank clerk at the Acton Branch of the London and South Western Bank," deposed that Heldmann had "opened an account at his branch bank in March" 1883 under his own name. Bocking

¹¹ "False Pretences at Tunbridge Wells," *Kent and Sussex Courier and Southern Counties Herald*, 11 April 1884, 8.

¹² *West Kent Quarter Sessions*, Wednesday 9 April 1884, 72. See also *County of Kent: Criminal Register: England and Wales 1884*, 284: "Return of all persons Committed, or Bailed to appear for Trial, or Indicted at the General Quarter Sessions held at Maidstone on the ninth day of April 1884, showing the nature of their offences, and the result of the proceedings."

¹³ *Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll*, November 1883–November 1884, no. 2100: "Hildmann, Bernard."

¹⁴ "False Pretences at Tunbridge Wells," 8.

“had not known prisoner before, but had an introduction from his brother who had an account and was very respectable.” Heldmann “received a cheque book containing 100 forms” but as early as 21 May, 1883, Bocking had cause to write to Heldmann “calling his attention to the irregular way in which the account had been kept.” Heldmann failed to respond, and Bocking closed the account.¹⁵ Bocking explained that the “first cheque to which he refused payment had come in on the 16th May” 1883. After May 1883, Heldmann had gone from bad to worse and was “believed to be wanted at various parts of the kingdom for various frauds.” When captured, his possessions included the telltale “cheque book [...], a gold watch and chain, some bills, and £2 5s. in money [...]. In one of the letters were three cheques taken from the prisoner’s cheque book, filled in for various amounts in different names.”¹⁶ These findings told a story of fraud: “all the recent counterfoils, from which the cheques were torn had not been filled up,” and the “original accounts seem to have ended in May” 1883, when Heldmann’s connection with *Union Jack* was terminated by Henty.¹⁷ Bocking explained that

Since he wrote to prisoner, 13 cheques had been presented, bearing prisoner’s signature or some other name in the writing of the prisoner which he recognized for a total sum of £271 3s. Eight of the cheques were in prisoner’s own signature. The 13 cheques were inclusive up to January 22nd. The eight cheques amounted to £1,198 1s. [...] It was a handwriting easily detected.¹⁸

The press reports tell a story of a man living on his wits in France, the Channel Islands and Britain:

Supt. Embury, of Tunbridge Wells, said he had found out that the prisoner had been to Guernsey, where he passed a cheque for £200, from thence he went to France, where he passed under the name of Dr. Wilson. He passed a cheque at Folkestone in the same name, and from thence went to different places in

¹⁵ “‘Captain Roberts’ Sent for Trial,” *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 20 February 1884, 3.

¹⁶ “Systematic Frauds by a ‘Captain,’” *Maidstone and Kentish Journal*, 21 February 1884, 3.

¹⁷ “Important Capture of an Alleged Swindler,” *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 13 February 1884, 3.

¹⁸ “‘Captain Roberts’ Sent for Trial,” 3.

England under different *noms de plume*, passing cheques wherever he went. There were several warrants out against him.¹⁹

Heldmann “was known to have crossed the Channel” on 7 December, 1883,²⁰ and had, since then, been staying at various British watering places until his capture at Tenby just over two months later. It seems, then, that he had left Britain earlier in 1883 and had been living the life of a fraudster for some time before his capture.

The newspaper reports reveal that Heldmann was living under a host of false names, including Captain Roberts, Captain Martyn, Henderson, and Dr. Wilson, and affecting a cultivated gentlemanly manner. He was, here, playing on the class prejudices of late-nineteenth-century British society. Heldmann, “a stylish person, aged 25,”²¹ is repeatedly described as having “the appearance of a well-to-do gentleman”²² and as “a well dressed individual.”²³ Heldmann’s stay at the Thrifts at Tunbridge Wells establishes his demanding habits:

He ordered a good dinner when he came in. [...] During that week she supplied him with puddings, &c., from her own stores, as well as tea and sugar and coals. He ordered his own wines, &c.. [...] He stated that he was a Captain and that he must have a hard bed, as military men did not like soft beds. [...] She did not volunteer sweets, as he asked for them.²⁴

The most comprehensive of these accounts of “the adventures of a swindler of the ‘high-toned’ sort” comes from the *North Wales Chronicle*, which reported on Heldmann’s exploits at Llandudno: the “fashionably-dressed, good-looking” fraudster, with his “manly, open countenance” here took on the identity of “Captain George Martyn, of the Indian Army” and “put on the airs of a gentleman” both “by general deportment” and by his “elaborate get-up.” The paper reported on the

¹⁹ “False Pretences at Tunbridge Wells,” 8.

²⁰ “Important Capture of an Alleged Swindler,” 3.

²¹ “An Alleged Swindler,” *Maidstone and Kentish Journal, Rochester and Chatham Journal, and South Eastern Advertiser*, 18 February 1884, 8.

²² “Capture of a Forger at Tenby,” 4.

²³ “Systematic Frauds by a ‘Captain,’” 3.

²⁴ “‘Captain Roberts’ Sent for Trial,” 3.

Captain's upper-class accent ("aw, and please give the portah this shilling"), his request for the "best wines," his parties, his breakfasts at 11am, and his dinners at 6:30pm. This "'awistoquatic' stranger" had spoken of his weekly £12 allowance from his father, cashed in the remittance when it "arrived," paid his £4 bill, and moved on with his £8 change, only for the townspeople to find out that "the Captain and his cheque [we]re entirely a fraud."²⁵ It is, then, apparent that Heldmann was here creating a convincing alter ego for himself. Such dual existences and criminal transactions would later form the mainstay of Richard Marsh's literary production (indeed, they feature prominently in *The Goddess*), and this "lost" period in Heldmann/ Marsh's life was, thus, clearly formative. It is, also, probable that Heldmann was writing during his adventures. The *Kent and Sussex Courier* reported on the insistent enquiries by Heldmann's solicitor for "a list of the papers, &c., found on the prisoner," including "a number of private papers having no bearing on the case."²⁶ Could these papers, which Heldmann was so eager to retrieve, have been manuscripts?

After his ignominious demise, Heldmann vanished from the literary scene for some time. We do not know what Heldmann did immediately upon his release from prison on 8 October, 1885. However, within a year, he had settled with a woman called Ada Kate Abbey. A number of Marsh's later novels portray an essentially good man coming out of prison and taking lodgings at a troubled household, the daughter of which he eventually marries: could this be how Heldmann met Ada? The couple's first child, Alice Kate, was born in July 1887 when Ada was only twenty years old and Heldmann working as a journalist for an unidentified paper or magazine; however, Alice died in her infancy in March 1888. Five further children, Harry, Mabel, Madge, Conrad, and Bertram, followed in rapid succession between July 1888 and January 1895.

Such a large family would have been hard for a young man with no expectations to support, and Heldmann may have resorted to producing fiction to supplement his income from journalism. He is likely to have been aware of his mother's will, dated

²⁵ "'Captain George Martyn, of the Indian Army,'" *North Wales Chronicle*, 23 February 1884, 6.

²⁶ "Important Capture of an Alleged Swindler," 3.

15 June 1888, which to all intents and purposes disinherited him by leaving him £25, plus a list of religious exhortations, out of an estate valued in 1911 at nearly £3000. By summer 1888 Heldmann was again producing fiction – now under the pseudonym “Richard Marsh,” a combination of his own first name and his mother’s maiden name, as well as the name of his maternal grandfather and, accidentally, of the trainer of the Prince of Wales’s racehorses. Heldmann’s burst of productivity coincided with the birth of his children and led to the growing prosperity of the family, as testified by their frequent relocations in West London and Sussex. Eventually, the family settled at Haywards Heath, Sussex, where Marsh died of heart failure and heart disease at the age of 57 on 9 August 1915.

The Goddess: A Demon (1900)

The Goddess: A Demon was published in summer 1900, a busy year for Marsh. The novel was initially serialized in the *Manchester Weekly Times and Salford Weekly News*, a regional penny weekly, in twelve installments between 12 January and 30 March, 1900. The paper regularly carried fiction, which was designed to be entertaining, to supply readers with leisure pursuits, and, in the case of serial fiction, to ensure continued sales. Marsh published in the *Manchester Weekly Times* on a regular basis in this period: in 1898, the paper had run his novella *The Woman with One Hand* (1899) in a serial format under the title “Something to his Advantage.” This was followed by “In Full Cry” in 1899 (*In Full Cry*, 1899), “The Strange Fortune of Pollie Blythe: The Story of a Chinese ‘God’” in 1900-01 (*The Joss: A Reversion*, 1901), and “The Man in the Glass Cage; or The Strange Story of the Twickenham Peerage” in 1901 (*The Twickenham Peerage*, 1902). In addition to these serials, three of Marsh’s short stories also appeared in the *Manchester Weekly Times* in the 1890s.

The serial was advertised prominently, and Marsh’s name featured both in the advertisements and at the top of each installment. The *Manchester Weekly Times* “boomed” the “brilliant” and “sensational” new serial as “a modern story of crime, love, and mystery” with “a remarkable opening.” The readers were told about the charms of the “extremely popular” Mr. Marsh:

His success is not far to seek. He brings to his work gifts of a very rare order; he is a delightfully unconventional writer, and tells a story in quite a unique way. Combining something of the sensationalism of Wilkie Collins with a humorous insight reminding one of Charles Dickens, his style exhibits qualities which it owes to neither of these famous novelists, no[r] to any other. It is characterised by a peculiar directness and vigour which invest the narrative with fascinating interest. As for plot and incident, it is sufficient to say that in all Mr. Marsh's stories the movement is very rapid, and the reader is hurried forward with breathless interest.²⁷

The weekly installments varied in length from 4500 to 6600 words, averaging 5500 words over two pages in the *Manchester Weekly Times's* eight-page fiction supplement, and concluded on a cliffhanger: Bessie's bloody cloak, the hesitation of Inspector Symonds, the Goddess's laughter. The first seven installments were illustrated by "Dean" with some rather crude black-and-white drawings which depicted the most dramatic scenes in the novel: Ferguson confronting the woman who came through the window from his bed; the discovery of the body (albeit with no sign of blood!); Dr. Hume pointing a revolver at Ferguson; and Ferguson's assault on Bernstein. Intriguingly, the Goddess herself is not portrayed at all, perhaps because of her implied nudity or because of the obviously limited abilities of the artist.

The novel was brought out in volume form by F.V. White, a publisher of popular fiction, who also issued Marsh's occult novels *The House of Mystery* (1898), *In Full Cry* (1899), and *The Joss: A Reversion* (1901). *The Goddess* was published at the standard price of 6s. in striking pictorial boards, reproduced with this edition. As noted by the *Academy's* review of the "Yarners," the title and the cover were designed to sell in a market where purchasing decisions could be made very quickly on the basis of first, often visual, impressions. The volume itself was not illustrated, and, indeed, the *Manchester Weekly Times* drawings were not of high enough a quality to appear in a 6s. volume.

²⁷ "Fiction for the New Year," *Manchester Weekly Times*, 22 December 1899, 9.

The critical reception of the novel, charted in Appendix A, was mixed. As noted at the beginning of this introduction, critics were by autumn 1900 exhausted with Marsh's work. "Mr. Marsh exhales novels; no pun or offence intended,"²⁸ the reviewer of the *Academy* joked, "We do our best to keep up with Mr. Marsh. [...] We have begun to take quite a sporting interest in Mr. Marsh, and ask ourselves anxiously – 'Can he manage twelve in the year?'"²⁹ The reviewer of *Judy* also criticized Marsh's prolificacy:

The book trade is pretty dull just now; but there are some writers whose activity nothing under the sun avails to quell. [...] if you would keep pace with Mr. Marsh it must be to the exclusion of most other people. I regret, however, that personally I had never any desire to keep pace with Mr. Marsh. I can, therefore, do no more than chronicle the appearance—I am much too wary to commit myself by calling it the latest—of another novel from his pen.³⁰

The *Academy* branded the novel "red-hot melodrama" and "capital reading for Margate," a scathing comment from this high-culture review.³¹ The *Athenaeum* was more encouraging, admitting that the novel "reflects credit on the imagination of the author," "has merit as a shocker, and [...] is fairly well written." Its "solution [...] is postponed with a skill that is equally creditable. There is a good deal of naïve humour about Ferguson and his narrative."³² The *Graphic* compared *The Goddess* to Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), a clear influence on the novel, stating that Marsh had "evidently made up his mind to go one better than" Poe:

[I]ts combination of ghastliness and ingenuity is completely in harmony with the methods of the Master, of whom its conception is by no means unworthy. In producing the requisite reality of effect he is less successful; he is without Poe's appreciation of the value of little details, and of the still greater value of

²⁸ "Notes on Novels," *Academy* 59 (13 October 1900): 310.

²⁹ "Notes on Novels," *Academy* 59 (17 November 1900): 468.

³⁰ H. Lush, "Scribes and Pharisees," *Judy, or the London Serio-Comic Journal* 60 (September 1900): 430.

³¹ "Notes on Novels," *Academy* 59 (11 August 1900): 112.

³² "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3798 (11 August 1900): 179.

the art of omission. It is something, however, that such a comparison should be favourably suggested.³³

The novel was moderately successful, remaining in print on Methuen's lists in the early twentieth century after the copyright changed hands. However, it cannot be said to have matched the popularity of Marsh's 1897 bestseller, *The Beetle: A Mystery*. In fact, the two novels have a good deal in common. Both are urban gothic texts set in a menacing, contemporary London which has suffered a supernatural foreign invasion by a female monster with apparent powers of mind control.

Fog and violence: Marsh's London

In *The Goddess*, an Indian sacrificial idol (the eponymous Goddess, an iron maiden with apparent supernatural powers) exerts an uncanny influence over an imperial adventurer-gone-wrong, the novel's villain Edwin Lawrence, seemingly precipitating him to alcoholism, insanity, fratricide, and, eventually, a gruesome suicide. Although we hear little of the imperial exploits which have brought Lawrence into contact with the Goddess, the novel is rooted in India and the Goddess represents a set of alien morals and practices introduced into contemporary London: "Some queer things still take place in India,"³⁴ the novel's first-person narrator John Ferguson, "an adventurer from the four corners of the world, soiled with something of the grime from each of them" (142), explains. The Indian backdrop, associated with the traumatic Uprising of 1857, would still have provoked unease at the end of the century. In nineteenth-century fiction, notably the stories by Kipling which we are told Lawrence is reading, India was also known as a place for young men to "go wrong." Imperialism conditions the behavior of the novel's male characters and affects the shape of their London scene. Ferguson, for example, explains that he is "a hard man" whose "life has been lived, for the most part, in odd corners of the world" (141), and he has a tendency to resort to violence when under pressure. The emphasis on Britain's imperial legacy is particularly strong at the beginning of *The Goddess*, which sees Ferguson and Lawrence visit the *Empire* Theatre before proceeding to their rooms in

³³ "New Novels," *Graphic*, 15 September 1900, 401.

³⁴ Richard Marsh, *The Goddess: A Demon* (London: F.V. White, 1900), 294. All further references to the novel will be placed within the text.

Imperial Mansions. Here, Ferguson sees “Lawrence *juggle* with the [card] pack” (1, my italics). These references bring the Empire and its twin legacies of imperial guilt and threat of colonial rebellion or revenge into the very heart of London.

While India forms a backdrop to the novel’s plotline, the text itself is set in modern London, a troubled city that was the centre of a national debate on social inequality and urban decay at the fin de siècle. London had grown at an uncomfortable pace in the nineteenth century, expanding from four million inhabitants in 1881 to seven million by 1911, resulting in overcrowding in the slums of the East End. *The Goddess* contains some remarkable crowd scenes, where the “hustling throng” gathers as out of nowhere to “h[a]ng round” the protagonists “like a fringe,” “growing, both in numbers and in impudence” in preparation for “an ugly rush” (240, 252-53). In keeping with contemporary fears of the lower orders swamping respectable London, the crowd is dangerous and predatory. Such depictions of social divisions were common at the fin de siècle, when London was typically portrayed as a city divided along geographical and class boundaries into a wealthy West and a poor East. In Marsh’s novel, the divisions in London are reflected in the doubling of characters: the crooked Edwin Lawrence murders his respectable brother Philip, and the divine Bessie Moore’s degenerate brother Tom is responsible for her impending downfall. Respectable London is here threatened from within by the unscrupulousness of degenerate middle-class men.

The attendant concerns over social disorder, national degeneration, and urban criminality were translated at the fin de siècle into a distinct sub-genre of the gothic mode, urban gothic, which focused on the decaying city as a site of corruption, degeneration, and transgression. An imagery of darkness, fog, and unknowability conveyed a sense of the city as a place of danger.³⁵ In *The Goddess*, the famous London fog, some contemporary descriptions of which are given in Appendix B, contributes quite remarkably to this disorientating and confining effect, turning day into night and preventing the characters from seeing clearly: “It was between three and four o’clock in the afternoon. Already the lamps were lighted. The fog still hung

³⁵ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-13; Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30-33.

over the city. From the appearance of things it might have been night” (215). In a device typical of detective fiction, the fog appears to gather more tightly as the characters grow increasingly puzzled at the mystery of the Goddess: “Through the mist, out there in the Fulham Road, there came the sound of a woman's laughter [...]—soft, low, musical; yet within it, indefinable, yet not to be mistaken, a quality which was pregnant with horrible suggestion” (229). The fog associated with the Goddess is symbolic both of the characters’ mental perturbation and of the anonymity and menace of London.

In turn-of-the-century literature and social discourse, London is depicted as the site both of erotic opportunity and of sexual danger. This “period of ‘sexual anarchy’”³⁶ witnessed heated debates over non-reproductive urban sexualities, particularly demands for sexual equality by outspoken New Women and scandals, most notoriously the trials in 1895 of Oscar Wilde, caused by the discovery of a homosexual subculture in the metropolis. While Marsh’s novel contains examples both of female independence and of homoerotic innuendo, it notably draws on the widely reported debates over prostitution and public morality at the fin de siècle. The 1880s witnessed the campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts, which had given the police powers to examine suspected prostitutes while making no provision for similar treatment of their male customers. The Acts were suspended in 1883 and repealed in 1886, the year when legislation was introduced to protect young girls from predatory men. The amendment to existing age-of-consent regulations was at least partly due to the influence of the crusading New Journalist W.T. Stead, whose *Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1885. Stead’s dark, distorted narrative portrayed London as a labyrinth where sexual corruption was a common fate. This was also the era of Mrs. Ormiston Chant’s campaign against visible prostitution in the West End, particularly at the Empire Theatre frequented by Lawrence and Ferguson, where prostitutes openly paraded. Chant wished to reclaim the streets of the West End for middle-class women who were beginning to frequent the area as shoppers, and in 1894 succeeded in briefly shutting the Empire down. Then, in the autumn of 1888, the unsolved Jack the Ripper murders, charted in Appendix C, brought public interest in the vice trade to a sensational pitch. A number

³⁶ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 2001), 3.

of prostitutes had been brutally murdered within a very small geographical area in Whitechapel in the East End of London, their bodies and faces slashed beyond recognition. In contemporary reportage, the Jack the Ripper case, like Stead's narrative, acquired a nightmarish gothic dimension, with a focus on the torn, mutilated and disemboweled bodies of the Ripper's victims. Speaking of the "superfluous brutality" of the murders, the "stains and pools of blood" that the murderer left behind him, the *East London Advertiser* sensationally compared the Ripper to "a murderous lunatic concealed in the slums of Whitechapel, who issues forth at night like another Hyde, to prey upon the defenceless women of the 'unfortunate' class."³⁷ The murders, like some "weird and terrible story of the supernatural," the paper added, had "excited the imagination of London to a degree without parallel" as "the mind turns as it were instinctively to some theory of occult force" and "[g]houls, vampires, [and] bloodsuckers [...] seize hold of the excited fancy."³⁸ The Ripper was gothicized as a "man monster," a "ghoul whose midnight murders have roused all London and frightened decent citizens in their beds."³⁹ "Yet," the *East London Advertiser* continued, "the most morbid imagination can conceive nothing worse than this terrible reality [...] that there is a being in human shape stealthily moving about a great city, burning with the thirst for human blood" and a "fiendish lust."⁴⁰ "The number of interesting, though blood-curdling theories," the paper concluded, could "form the material for a score of 'shilling dreadfuls.'"⁴¹

³⁷ "The Whitechapel Murder," *East London Advertiser* (8 September 1888). *Casebook: Jack the Ripper*.

http://www.casebook.org/press_reports/east_london_advertiser/ela880908.html

(accessed April 13, 2010).

³⁸ "A Thirst for Blood," *East London Advertiser* (6 October 1888). *Casebook: Jack the Ripper*.

http://www.casebook.org/press_reports/east_london_advertiser/ela881006.html

(accessed April 13, 2010).

³⁹ "The Whitechapel Murders and the Police," *East London Advertiser* (15 September 1888). *Casebook: Jack the Ripper*.

http://www.casebook.org/press_reports/east_london_advertiser/ela880915.html

(accessed April 13, 2010).

⁴⁰ "A Thirst for Blood."

⁴¹ "Homicidal Mania," *East London Advertiser* (6 October 1888). *Casebook: Jack the Ripper*.

http://www.casebook.org/press_reports/east_london_advertiser/ela881006.html

(accessed April 13, 2010).

Marsh's "six-shilling dreadful" recalls contemporary accounts of sexual desire and corruption in fin-de-siècle London. The beginning of the novel promotes this notion of the Goddess as a lady of terrible pleasure. At the beginning of the novel, narrator John Ferguson, a former imperialist who confesses to having had little to do with women, experiences "a vision of the night." He has "no recollection of putting anything on in the shape of clothes" when he feels "an uncontrollable impulse to go to Lawrence," the neighbor with whom he is "on terms of intimacy" (4-5). In the other man's rooms, Ferguson witnesses a heavily charged scene involving "some wild beast [...] beside itself with fury. Yelling, snarling, screeching—a horrid, gasping noise—these sounds seemed to follow hard upon each other." Uttering "faint cries [...] of both pain and terror," Lawrence is seen "struggling frantically with some strange creature" which assails him "with its whole force," "rain[ing] on to his motionless body a hail of blows, making all the time that horrid, gasping noise" before breaking into "a woman's laughter" (6-7). Lawrence, the reader knows by this stage, is not quite the gentleman he seems, and the scene may be interpreted as Ferguson engaging in homoerotic voyeurism by peeping in on his friend's nocturnal pleasures. Like a common prostitute, the Goddess, the "strange creature" emitting the "horrid, gasping noise", is always "ready" and "willing," "well worth looking at," and "only needs a touch to fill her with impassioned frenzy. It is for that touch that she waits and watches" (279-80, 289-90). Her life-size figure is "of a brilliant scarlet," the color of blood, sexuality, violence, and anger, with "a curious suggestion of life" (289), and her "performance" mimics sexual intercourse:

As Lawrence sprang forward, the figure rose to its feet, and in an instant was alive. It opened its arms; from its finger-tips came knives. Stepping forward it gripped Lawrence with its steel-clad hands, with a grip from which there was no escaping. From every part of its frame gleaming blades had sprung; against this *cheval-de-frise* it pressed him again and again, twirling him round and round, moving him up and down, so that the weapons pierced and hacked back and front. Even from its eyes, mouth, and nostrils had sprung knives. It kept jerking its head backwards and forwards, so that it could stab with them at his face and head. And, all the while, from somewhere came the sound of a woman's laughter [...]. A sharp-pointed blade, more than eighteen inches long, which proceeded from its stomach, had pierced him through and through. The

writhing, gibbering puppet held him skewered in a dozen places. [...] Down he came, with his assailant sticking to him like a limpet. Pinning him on the floor, it continued its extraordinary contortions, lacerating its victim with every movement in a hundred different places. It was difficult to believe that it was not alive. [...] As if its lust for blood was glutted, it rolled over, lethargically, upon its side, leaving its handiwork exposed—a horrible spectacle. A grin—as it were a smile, born of repletion—was on the creature's face (291-93).

The extraordinary sadism of this bizarre torture ritual equates sex with pain, death and humiliation. For Kelly Hurley, the Goddess's "repletion" is connected with unnatural foreign female desire.⁴² However, the idol's "handiwork" must surely have put contemporary readers in mind of the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888, which had presented the public with the spectacle of torn and mutilated female bodies. *The Goddess* displaces some of the horror of the murders, with their slashed and disfigured corpses, onto the novel's eponymous mechanical puppet and her "lust for blood". Like the Ripper, the "Goddess of the Scarlet Hands" (291) mutilates her victims beyond recognition: "his face and head had been cut and hacked to pieces. [...] His flesh had been ripped and rent so that not one recognisable feature was left. Indeed, it might not have been a man we were looking upon, but some thing of horror" (33). The monster's "mutilated" (296) victims, "all cut and slashed and sliced into ribbons" (262), present "a horrible spectacle" that recalls the Ripper's trail of blood. Interestingly, however, it is a female figure that here slashes men, as if in some strange inversion of the original murders in Whitechapel. Indeed, the Goddess's "*cheval-de-frise*" leads to a complete reversal of gender roles: it is the male who is here penetrated by the multiple knives which spring from the Goddess's supple body, recalling the mouths of female vampires in contemporary gothic fiction which similarly reveal an unexpected box of tools.

Modernity and mental health

⁴² Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 185.

The size, anonymity and social divisions of London are essential to the plot of the novel in allowing Edwin Lawrence to commit his crimes and vanish into the vast city. The beginning of *The Goddess* sees Lawrence and Ferguson in the comfort of the West End. A man of fastidious tastes and a liking for comfort, the urbanite Lawrence is described as “one of the most finical men [...] on the subject of draughts. A properly ventilated apartment set him shivering, even in the middle of summer. The faintest suspicion of a healthy current of air made him turn up the collar of his coat. No room could be too stuffy for him” (111). Such sensitivity sets Lawrence up as suspect, since healthy Anglo-Saxon manhood should surely not shiver at the thought of fresh air, and by the end of the first chapter, we share Ferguson’s suspicions over his integrity. Lawrence’s lack of financial foresight and an innate tendency towards criminality send him on his downward journey. For much of the novel, the reader must suppose Lawrence dead, but towards its end we learn that he has, in fact, abandoned his snug bachelor pad for a “large, bare, barn-like room” (266) in residential Pimlico in “a building which, outwardly, was more like a warehouse than a private residence” (253). Inside,

The floor was bare. [...] The furniture was scanty. In one corner was a camp bedstead, the bedclothes in disorder. [...] Bottles, indeed, were everywhere; designed, too, to contain all sorts of liquids—wines, spirits, beers. Champagne appeared to have been drunk by the gallon. On the floor, in the corner, opposite the bedstead, were at least seven or eight dozen unopened bottles, of all sizes, sorts, and shapes. (266).

Lawrence has, then, gone from extreme comfort to extreme squalor. This social transgression is equated in the novel with Lawrence’s mental breakdown, attributed to his obsession with the Goddess, his “demon” (245).

Marsh’s novel insistently questions the mental health not only of Lawrence but of everybody. Interest in the study of the mind had increased in the course of the nineteenth century, and insanity was essentially seen as a disease of the highly civilized and industrialized: as Appendices D and E testify, the hectic excitement of urban life, the increased competitiveness of the business world, the use of alcohol and drugs, a new ease of access to education, and the reading of exciting fiction were all

seen as conducive to mental illness. As Andrew Wynter bleakly concluded in 1875, “That there is an immense amount of latent brain disease in the community, only awaiting a sufficient exciting cause to make itself patent to the world, there can be no manner of doubt.”⁴³ The “fearful progress of this moral avalanche”⁴⁴ was particularly noticeable in cities, where “neuropathic brains which do not offer normal resistance to nervous currents” were likely to “find themselves in a state of constant excitation and irritation”⁴⁵ and “obsessed by fear.” This, supposedly, resulted in “the chronic condition” of “nerve exhaustion” which the sufferer was “inclined to relieve [...] by imbibing alcohol with the result that the more he drinks the more he wants, until such imbibing becomes habitual.”⁴⁶ As noted in Appendices D, E and F, these psychological theories challenged the notion of a stable personality by suggesting that identity, memory and thought could be disrupted by traumatic experiences, artificial agents, and suppressed drives. This notion was most famously articulated at the fin de siècle by Sigmund Freud, whose dynamic psychiatry maintained that whenever unconscious psychic drives, particularly erotic urges, were repressed, their energy inevitably appeared elsewhere, typically in hysterical or obsessive behavior.

The Goddess is a text obsessed with nervous maladies connected with modernity, including instances of hysteria, hallucination, irrationality, paranoia, persecution complex, delirium tremens, and dementia. The text abounds with medical terminology connected to mental health: “imbecile[s]” (12), “idiots” (86), “raving lunatic[s]” (96) and “maniac[s]” (257) feature prominently in this novel populated by characters who are “stark mad” (63), “off [their] mental balance” (73) and “mentally incapable” (129). Although Marsh mostly uses these terms in a non-medical sense, the frequency with which they occur marks the paranoia over mental health that characterizes the novel. The discussion is firmly situated within contemporary medical debates by the introduction of the character of Dr. Hume. Hume, “an authority on madness” (262),

⁴³ Andrew Wynter, “The Borderlands of Insanity,” in *The Borderlands of Insanity and Other Allied Papers* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1875), 1.

⁴⁴ Forbes Winslow, *On Obscure Diseases of the Brain, and Disorders of the Mind: Their Incipient Symptoms, Pathology, Diagnosis, Treatment, and Prophylaxis* (London: John Churchill, 1860), 174.

⁴⁵ Josiah Morse, *The Psychology and Neurology of Fear* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Clark University Press, 1907), 44.

⁴⁶ Frederick William Alexander, “‘Claustrophobia’: Cause and Cure” ([n.p.]: [n.p.], 1925), 1-2.

“is a student of what he calls obscure diseases of the brain; insisting that we have all of us a screw loose somewhere, and that out of every countenance insanity peeps” (35). The sanity of Ferguson and Bessie is constantly in doubt, Bessie’s brother Tom is portrayed as a degenerate criminal, and Dr. Hume himself suffers from obsessions and paranoia. The most notable example of mental breakdown in the novel is, however, Edwin Lawrence. Lawrence’s descent into madness is partly hereditary, partly self-acquired, and partly linked to the experience of modernity. Like Tom, Lawrence was “born with a twist in [him]; a moral malformation; a trend in the grain which, as [he] got [his] growth, gave a natural inclination in a particular direction” (271). Marsh is here referencing fin-de-siècle theories of degeneration, which saw hereditary degenerate tendencies as symptomatic of the modern world, and, particularly, of urban life. Lawrence is a creature of the city and, in contemporary medical parlance, predisposed to nervous ailments.

However, Lawrence exacerbates these tendencies by “the life of dissipation” (282) he leads and, in particular, his alcohol consumption, which, as Appendix E testifies, was seen at the time as a cause of mental breakdown. Alcohol abuse, leading to delirium tremens, accentuates Lawrence’s inherent tendencies towards paranoia and persecution complex. In particular, Lawrence now begins to dread spatial confinement, a key characteristic of the modern city, refusing to enter public transport: “I’ll have none of your cabs,” he explains, “I’ll walk. I’m cribb’d, cabined, and confined out in the open; in a cab I’d stifle” (245). The fear of being forced to enter a cab provokes “a fit of maniacal fury” and a “crescendo” threat of bodily violence (246). Lawrence associates his condition with psychic persecution by the Goddess and is haunted by auditory hallucinations of the Goddess’s laughter: “There’s a hand upon my heart, a grip upon my throat, a weight upon my head;” Lawrence explains, “they make it hard to breathe” (245). In an interesting conflation of the gothic register with medical terminology, Lawrence believes himself to be haunted by the Goddess, his “demon” (245), but Ferguson describes Lawrence’s increasing *insanity* as his “demon:” “He was not mad, as yet, but on the border line, where men fight with demons. He had been drinking, to drive them back; but they had come the more, threatening, on every hand, to shut him in for ever” (243). As Appendices D and E testify, such language was commonly used in medical discourse

at the time, and Marsh here offers us a particularly striking example of such discursive overlap.

Though mental disorders affected both sexes, mental problems were typically seen as “a female malady” in the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Victorian medicine defined female sexuality in essentially biological terms, with respectable female sexuality linked to the reproductive function. Paradoxically, while women were held to be paragons of virtue, innocence and morality, theories of female mental disorders were inextricably linked to female sexuality and the supposed instability of the female reproductive system at the “critical periods” of the female life—puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, and the menopause.⁴⁸ Attempts were made to control female sexuality especially at these points, lest previously chaste women should suddenly go wrong and damage the patriarchal family unit, the cornerstone of Victorian society. The concept of “moral” insanity, as opposed to “intellectual” insanity, is key to the definition of female mental health in this period. One doctor defined moral insanity as “a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, tempers, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect, or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion or hallucination.”⁴⁹ This definition blurs the boundaries of eccentricity, vice, crime and insanity, and according to it almost any socially disruptive behavior could be classified as moral insanity requiring patriarchal “moral management” of the patient. Sexual rebelliousness and erotic excitement in women were prime factors in the attribution of moral insanity.⁵⁰ The end of the century also witnessed the diagnosis of hysteria as an essentially feminine illness. At the Salpêtrière Clinic in Paris, Jean-Martin Charcot offered highly charged demonstrations with his hysterical female patients, which popularized the image of the hysterical fit or contortion, where the patient’s body would be convulsed with seemingly uncontrollable, often sexually suggestive movements. Appendix F charts contemporary medical and fictional responses to hysteria and female sexuality.

⁴⁷ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 2001), 3.

⁴⁸ Showalter, *Female Malady*, 55-59.

⁴⁹ Edgar Sheppard, *Lectures on Madness in its Medical, Legal, and Social Aspects* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1873), 87.

⁵⁰ Showalter, *Female Malady*, 29-30.

Bessie Moore, the heroine of Marsh's novel, is characterized as "an angel" (143) and "the gentlest, sweetest soul" (94) in keeping with the Victorian cult of the Angel in the House, the chaste, passive, domestic woman. Her "wondrous beauty" (142) is emphasized alongside her innocence and domestic virtues. Importantly, Bessie resides away from the buzz of the frantic city, in a reassuringly "nice, wide, clean, old-fashioned street." Her "nice, clean, old-fashioned house" is described in terms that reflect the character of its occupant:

It was not large, but the impression which its exterior made upon me was a distinctly pleasant one. It was detached; it stood back, behind railings, at a little distance from the pavement; in the sunshine it looked as white as snow; there was a flower-bed in front, and flowers made the window-sills resplendent (88).

Bessie's home possesses all the feminine virtues: it is clean, old-fashioned, pure in its whiteness, decked in flowers and, crucially, modest, standing some distance from the pavement. However, Bessie's sanity and innocence are suspect for much of the novel. Her association with the theatre, the apparent degeneracy and criminality of her brother, and her relationship with the masculine, aggressively possessive Miss Adair all point to a nervous weakness hidden by her beauty. Her confrontation with the Goddess accentuates this weakness, precipitating her into a state of semi-imbecility for much of the novel. It is, however, apparent that she has played some part in the strange orgy that Ferguson has witnessed in Lawrence's rooms. Her entry into his bedroom, too, puts her in a vulnerable position: it is clear from Ferguson's narrative that he expects to confront either a burglar or a prostitute. Tellingly, her appeal to Ferguson, who subscribes to the contemporary notion of women's moral superiority, is at its strongest when she is at her most vulnerable: this childlike, passive, helpless figure, Ferguson seems to suggest, is his ideal woman.

Bessie's part in the murder leaves her in a state approximating an automaton. This links Bessie, "the idol of the town" (142), to the Goddess, a mechanical sacrificial "idol; apparently a Hindoo goddess" (289). The nocturnal wanderings of Bessie, the primary suspect for the murder in *Imperial Mansions*, coincide with the activities of

the Goddess, and their moonlight setting directs the reader to the perceived link between female sexuality, the menstrual cycle and insanity. While Bessie's sexuality appears thoroughly subdued, even repressed, it is also important to note that she is an actress who performs on stage in front of audiences, and the way in which men fall at her feet bears witness to her sex appeal. This suggests that Bessie is able to perform femininity, and, indeed, her appearances in this novel saturated with theatrical references are essentially dramatic, even "stagey" (271), characterized by effective entrances and melodramatic lines: "I had never before seen such acting as hers" (86), Ferguson admits, and now Bessie "depict[s] herself as playing a leading part in a hideous tragedy" (115). The Goddess's "unrivalled performances" (286), similarly, take place on a dais in front of a male audience. These "extraordinary contortions" closely mirror the hysterical fits showcased by Charcot's patients at the Salpêtrière. The gruesome performances of the Goddess, however, leave *Bessie* in a hysterical state and "all covered with blood," a symbol of violence but also of sexuality: "She had smeared her countenance with her fingers; all down one side of her face was a crimson stain" (15). In a text obsessed with hidden mental disease, this doubling of Bessie and the Goddess cannot be ignored. "It is as if I were two persons, and each keeps losing the other," Bessie wails, "Can there be two persons in one body? My brain seems blurred—as if it were in two parts. When I am using one part, the other—the other's all confused" (118). Bessie and the Goddess mirror each other in their associations with blood, in their sexual allure, and in their anger: the chaste Englishwoman with her melodic laughter and legitimate cause for anger has her evil foreign double, whose laughter is sinister and rage excessive. The Goddess may look harmless but her embrace is deadly; could Bessie, too, be "playing [the] part" of the Victorian angel (20)?

At the end of the novel, Bessie reassuringly marries Ferguson, a "prodigy of bone and muscle" (147), who will have the stamina to keep her on the straight. The Goddess is dismantled and, not entirely convincingly, explained to consist of a clockwork machinery and a phonograph containing a woman's laughter. Seemingly, then, our hero and heroine end the novel on a happy note. However, *The Goddess* is not a reassuring text. The novel discusses a great number of contemporary anxieties: the mental health of the modern city dweller, hysterical tendencies, duality, criminality, degeneration, illicit sex, alcoholism and extreme violence are the most prominent of

these. The setting of the novel in a foggy, menacing London accentuates the fear of these social problems and seems to preclude any conclusive solution. Was the Goddess simply a mechanical puppet, or did she have supernatural powers? This Valancourt volume now makes this rich gothic novel available to contemporary readers in a reliable critical edition.