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### Locating the Sympathetic Insect: Cultural Entomology, Egyptianised Gothic, and Emotional Affect in Richard Marsh's 'The Beetle'

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**Citation: Leaf, Janette Marie (2022) Locating the Sympathetic Insect: Cultural Entomology, Egyptianised Gothic, and Emotional Affect in Richard Marsh's 'The Beetle'. [Thesis] (Unpublished)**

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**LOCATING THE SYMPATHETIC INSECT:  
CULTURAL ENTOMOLOGY, EGYPTIANISED GOTHIC, AND EMOTIONAL AFFECT IN  
RICHARD MARSH'S *THE BEETLE***

**JANETTE MARIE LEAF**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, THEATRE AND  
CREATIVE WRITING TO FULFIL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF  
PHILOSOPHY**

**BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

**SEPTEMBER 2021**

**Declaration**

I, Janette Marie Leaf declare this thesis is all my own work.

Signed.....

Date.....

## Abstract

Reactions to fictional insects affect actions towards insects in the real world. Reactions to real world insects inform interpretations of insects on the page. One feeds into the other. Authorial manipulation of insect imagery influences whether that process is beneficial or detrimental to the small creatures themselves and by extension to any persons they are called upon to represent. This thesis studies entomological rhetoric, acknowledging the negative and seeking the positive. It introduces insects as sentient creatures in a state of plight, assesses human responses to them, verbal and visual depictions of them, and dominant critical interpretations of them, and identifies an opportunity in late nineteenth-century fiction to expand scholarship by focusing on that location. Its key approach is cultural entomology, a praxis characterised by interdisciplinarity. Its methodology is to take a single text foregrounding an insect and examine it in several environments. The text is Richard Marsh's 1897 *The Beetle: A Mystery*, written at the nexus of Beetlemania and Egyptomania. The novel's eponymous, monstrous scarab functions as an ideological representation of a subdivision of the feminised Orient so that entomophobia becomes imbricated with xenophobia. This thesis draws in contemporaneous examples of Egyptian and entomological Gothic, art, material objects and museum culture, and explores direct evolution of *The Beetle* in its screen and stage adaptations and divergent afterlives in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and elsewhere. The purpose is to address the shifting impact on the perception of kinship and fellow feeling for the insect. Tracing a trajectory from natural history to horror to ecology, the rationale for 'locating the sympathetic insect' rests on the premise that experiencing sympathy is a prerequisite for the generation of a positive response to bugs translatable into globally and environmentally advantageous behaviour: an outcome potentially undermined by the Gothicised Beetle.

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## Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to the many people who have helped and encouraged me along the way. A strong family and academic community throughout an otherwise solitary activity has been a blessing.

My sincere thanks go to: my supervisor, Roger Luckhurst for giving me the freedom to explore bugs, the guidance not to get lost in the undergrowth, and his sublime confidence from the outset my larval project would grow wings and fly; Anthony Shepherd for his unfailing administrative help and friendly presence; Carolyn Burdett for honing ideas on sympathy; Birkbeck's PhD community and the English departmental staff for wisdom and chats; and the Graduate Research School for training and support.

I have been fortunate to be embraced by wonderful academic organisations including: The British Society for Literature and Science; The Victorian Popular Fiction Association; British Association of Victorian Studies; London's Nineteenth-Century Studies Group; and the Open Graves, Open Minds Project. All have made the PhD journey less lonely through their companionship, wonderful conferences, and warm receptions for my own papers. I am also grateful to the Victorian Web and those who scan for archive.org for providing fantastic online resources. I am glad British Library Publishing allowed me to infect them with enthusiasm for insect imagery, and I am hopeful their having brought my co-edited bug anthology into being demonstrates this thesis too has legs.

The University of Hertfordshire will always hold a place in my heart for smoothing my way back into academia after a hiatus of decades. Of the fantastic staff, special mention goes to Rowland Hughes for supervising my Masters dissertation, enthusing me with ecocriticism and never expressing the slightest doubt as to my ability to succeed. Much affection goes to my firm friendship group, the wonderfully non-ageist Masters of Articulation who made studying supportive and fun!

I remain thankful Newnham recognised my potential over forty years ago and awarded me an Exhibition to read English at Cambridge where, during supervisions for undergraduate dissertations, Piers Brendon's historicism and Jean Chothia's interdisciplinarity helped establish good writing practices on which I continue to build.

Lastly and most personally: my love and appreciation goes to my very recently deceased mother who left school at fourteen, always encouraged me to be the first in the family to pursue higher education and who kept going until submission of my thesis; to my father who sadly died before my doctoral research got underway, but celebrated the acceptance of my proposal; to my daughters, Madeleine and Miranda, of whom I am so proud, and who are proud of me for having quit my job to follow my research dream at a mature age; and most of all to my husband, Adam, who has supported me through pandemic lockdowns and medical operations, gifted me a first edition of *The Beetle*, bought me bug jewellery, proof-read my entire thesis for typos despite rarely picking up a book, and who still retains his sense of humour despite innumerable conversations about scarabs!



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## Introduction

Reactions to fictional insects affect actions towards insects in the real world. Reactions to real world insects inform interpretations of them on the page. One feeds into the other. Authorial manipulation of insect imagery influences whether that process is beneficial or detrimental to the small creatures themselves and by extension any persons they are called upon to represent, and so this thesis studies entomological rhetoric, acknowledging the negative and seeking the positive. It introduces insects as sentient creatures in a state of plight, assesses human reactions to them, depictions of them, and dominant critical interpretations of them, and identifies an opportunity in late nineteenth-century fiction to expand scholarship by focusing on that location. Its key approach is cultural entomology, a praxis characterised by interdisciplinarity, situating this thesis, if not definitively within what Martin Willis calls the ‘interdiscipline’ of literature and science scholarship, at least in an abutting field.<sup>1</sup> Its methodology is to take a single text foregrounding an insect and examine it in several environments: scientific, religious, political, mythological, museum and material cultures, and contemporaneous examples in a similar genre. The novel is Richard Marsh’s 1897 Gothic bestseller, *The Beetle: A Mystery*, popularly abbreviated to *The Beetle*.<sup>2</sup>

First, defining what is intended by the critical approach of ‘cultural entomology’ and explaining how entomophobia becomes imbricated with elements of xenophobia, this introduction then draws on nineteenth-century conceptualising of insects as moral exemplars constituting evidence of divine creation, and contrasts that view with the scientific positioning of invertebrates as part of an evolutionary progression inclusive of humankind. Straddling both camps was the populist study of insects as eminently collectible, fascinating creatures. *The Beetle* was written at the nexus of Beetlemania and Egyptomania. Embodied within the novel is a subtextual

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Willis, *Literature and Science* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1, 167.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Beetle: A Mystery* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1897).

discourse shaped by entomology, natural history, ‘modern’ religion, mythology, and archaeology.<sup>3</sup> Influences stemming from Egyptomania prompt an overview of *fin-de-siècle* reception studies of Ancient Egypt. This establishes the scarab’s divine status and intimate association with rebirth within the polytheistic belief system, thereby enhancing its positive metaphorical resonances in preparation for close analysis of Marsh’s text in the body of the thesis. To lay the groundwork for an assessment of whether the insect or insectile within *The Beetle* is discoverable attracting sympathy or even dispensing it, this introduction then moves on to consider the late-nineteenth-century heritage of Adam Smith and Charles Darwin and their theories on sympathy, bolstering it with current theoreticians and historians of that emotion. The rationale for ‘locating the sympathetic insect’ rests on the premise that sympathy is a prerequisite for the generation of a positive response to bugs translatable into behaviours globally and environmentally advantageous: an outcome that may be undermined by the creature appearing in the Gothic genre or assisted by imaginative re-positioning.

### **Cultural Entomology**

Insects are the minutiae of sentient life, small exoskeletal creatures with a long history stretching back over 400 million years.<sup>4</sup> They are ubiquitous: thriving in the air, on land, beneath the earth and even on water. They are various: existing in a multiplicity of shapes and forms, with conservative estimates calculating there are more than one million species.<sup>5</sup> They are numerous: with over one billion insects for every human,

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<sup>3</sup> For an extensive analysis of ‘Beetlemania’, see Cannon Schmitt, ‘Victorian Beetlemania’, in *Victorian Animal Dreams*, ed. by Deborah Denenholz Morse, Martin A Danahay (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 35–51.

<sup>4</sup> Ricardo Pérez de la Fuente, ‘Fossil Insect Wonders’, Oxford University Museum of Natural History webinar (07 October 2020).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Entomology: Facts and Figures’, *Royal Entomological Society* <<https://www.royensoc.co.uk/facts-and-figures>> [accessed 04 July 2021].

and a biomass seventy times that of ours.<sup>6</sup> Such plentiful diversity renders them objects of fascination, susceptible to being collected, classified, analysed and analogised by amateurs and professionals alike. Some insects pose threats to agriculture or act as vectors for disease: others are pollinators or nutrient recyclers or producers of valuable secretions. Socio-biologist, ecologist and Pulitzer prize-winning author, E. O. Wilson, designates them 'the little things that run the world'.<sup>7</sup> Some years after this much quoted statement he expresses the same view in more urgent phraseology.

So important are insects [...] that if all were to disappear, humanity probably could not last more than a few months. Most of the amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals would crash to extinction about the same time. Next would go the bulk of the flowering plants and with them the physical structure of most forests and other terrestrial habitats of the world. The land surface would literally rot.<sup>8</sup>

Insects play a vital role maintaining ecological equilibrium often underestimated outside scientific or environmental communities. It is a persuasive argument for the importance of research into metaphorical applications of insects drawing on their fecundity, invasiveness, vulnerability, resilience, and drastic transformations of state. Most insects are holometabolous, transitioning through a life cycle from egg to ravenous larva to pupa to adult in a complete metamorphosis.<sup>9</sup> Arachnids and centipedes are regularly grouped with them under the loose term of creepy crawlies, however those other invertebrates have a different morphology, and so fall outside the parameters of an investigation already potentially too vast.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 'Entomology: Facts'.

<sup>7</sup> Edward O. Wilson, 'The Little Things that Run the World', *Conservation Biology*, 1.4 (December 1987), 344-46.

<sup>8</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (London, Penguin Books, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Ants, bees, wasps, flies, beetles, butterflies, moths, and fleas are all holometabolous. The three-stage process of egg, nymph and mature adult known as incomplete metamorphosis is experienced by cockroaches, termites, praying mantises and grasshoppers.

<sup>10</sup> These non-insect arthropods have more legs and once hatched, grow by a series of exoskeletal moults.

Insects are indispensable to humankind, yet, in spite of the fact they are dying out at an apocalyptic rate, frequently prompt phobic responses rather than protective ones.<sup>11</sup> Entomologist and psychologist, Jeffrey A. Lockwood characterises the extreme emotion of entomophobia as ‘a disgust-imbued fear’ in which a sufferer often envisages insects as ‘dreadful symbols of waste and destruction [...], mortality and decay.’<sup>12</sup> Lockwood propounds entomophobia as an evolved response to the real danger posed by certain species, which in millions of people develops into a general and in many cases irrational adverse reaction to all kinds of insects.<sup>13</sup> Stephen R. Kellert, social ecologist and associate of E. O. Wilson, argues in line with Lockwood that especially unnerving is the perceived threat insects will pierce our skin by bite or sting or parasitically inhabit us.<sup>14</sup> Kellert also identifies additional motivational factors for dislike and distrust of the small creatures. Among them he highlights: the ‘radical “autonomy” of invertebrates from human will and control’; the different spatial and even temporal references of insects to our own; their alarming multiplicity; the perceived ‘monstrosity’ of their forms; and their presumed absence of feeling.<sup>15</sup> Such traits according to Eric Brown in *Insect Poetics* cause insects to occupy a conceptual space as ‘Humanity’s Other’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dave Goulson, ‘The Insect Apocalypse: “Our World Will Grind to a Halt Without Them”’, *Observer* (25 July 2021), [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/25/the-insect-apocalypse-our-world-will-grind-to-a-halt-without-them?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/25/the-insect-apocalypse-our-world-will-grind-to-a-halt-without-them?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other) [accessed 27 July 2021]; Damian Carrington, ‘“Insect Apocalypse” Poses Risk to all Life on Earth Warns Scientists’, *Guardian* (13 November 2019), <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/13/insect-apocalypse-poses-risk-to-all-life-on-earth-conservationists-warn>> [accessed 25 June 2021]; Brooke Jarvis, ‘The Insect Apocalypse is Here’, *New York Times Magazine* (27 November 2018), <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/27/magazine/insect-apocalypse.html>> [accessed 25 June 2021];

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey A. Lockwood, *The Infested Mind: Why Humans Fear, Loathe and Love Insects* (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 1, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Lockwood, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen R. Kellert, ‘The Biological Basis for Human Values of Nature’, in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, ed. by Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson (Washington DC: Island Press, 1993), pp. 57-58.

<sup>15</sup> Kellert, pp. 57-58.

<sup>16</sup> Eric C. Brown, ‘Introduction’, in *Insect Poetics*, ed. by Eric C. Brown (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. ix-xxiii (p. xi).

Routinely the allegorical insect is extremely negatively connoted such as when Frankenstein dubs his monster 'vile insect'.<sup>17</sup> In 2015, British Prime Minister David Cameron referred to migrants as 'a swarm' and it was interpreted as implying he considered them beneath sympathetic concern and led to widespread condemnation of his entomological rhetoric. 'He should remember he's talking about people and not insects' protested Harriet Harman the acting Labour Leader; the Refugee Council complained the politician's comments were 'irresponsible' and 'dehumanising'; and the UN Special Representative for International Migration accused him of a 'xenophobic response'.<sup>18</sup> Assuming derogatory associations are intended whenever insect imagery is used appears to be the default position. This thesis explores whether through subversion or imaginative re-interpretation, entomological tropes in a work of fiction might be read as less unappealingly alien so insects might be conceived of in a positive way. In life, as in literature, entrenched negative assumptions about insects accompanied by a positioning of them in opposition to humans is dangerously divisive. At its very worst it is used to justify mass killing as Christopher Hollingsworth argues in 'The Force of the Entomological Other':

the instrumental insect metaphor [contains] elements of a general poetics of imperialism and genocide [...] its power to mentally stage a confrontation between antithetical modes of being that concludes with the necessary and therefore satisfying extermination of the Other.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis will be exposing to what extent entomological 'poetics of imperialism and genocide' is present within *The Beetle*, a late-nineteenth-century location in which prejudice might be thought likely to reside.

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* [1818] (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> 'David Cameron criticised over migrant "swarm" language' <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-33716501>> [accessed 24 June 2021].

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Hollingsworth, 'The Force of the Entomological Other: Insects as Instruments of Intolerant Thought and Oppressive Action', in *Insect Poetics* pp. 262-77 (p. 267). See also David Livingstone Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (New York, St Martin's Press, 2011).

In terms of sustained scholarly attention to insect imagery, Rachel Murray's *The Modernist Exoskeleton* indicates what can be achieved, however pre-Modernist texts are rarely subject to extended interrogation with an entomological inflection unless examples are taken from Antiquity, the Early Modern, Renaissance or the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> This is certainly the pattern in *Insect Poetics*, which, although it contains telling observations on: the rhetoric and aesthetic of insects; the pan-Atlantic influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862); and unsettling insects, only contains one study of nineteenth-century fiction relating to Herman Melville (1819-1891). *Insects in Literature and the Arts* likewise predominantly features essays on twentieth-century subjects.<sup>21</sup> Even Hélène Machinal's contribution on Poe and Conan Doyle in 'Detectives, Beetles and Scientists' has more to do with the peculiarities of entomologists than with the creatures they collect and study.<sup>22</sup> Marina Warner's *Fantastic Metamorphoses* themes its chapters according to stages of the insect life cycle.<sup>23</sup> Somewhat illogically she places 'Mutating' before 'Hatching'. She encompasses Ovid and ancient myth, Hieronymous Bosch's paintings, Leda and the swan, and Franz Kafka, but her discussion of nineteenth-century prose including the later works of Lewis Carroll and uncanny fiction of the 1880s and 1890s contains comparatively little directly related to insects themselves. This is in no way to deny Warner's influence on this thesis, particularly in relation to shapeshifting. She astutely observes: 'it is characteristic of metamorphic writing to appear in transitional places and at the confluence of traditions and civilisations'. A novel written at the *fin de siècle* incorporating a clash of cultures and named for a holometabolous creature exactly fits Warner's description.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rachel Murray, *The Modernist Exoskeleton: Insects, War, Literary Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Laurence Talairach-Vielmas and Marie Bouchet, eds, *Insects in Literature and the Arts* (Oxford: P.I.E Peter Lang, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Helene Machinal, 'Detectives, Beetles and Scientists: "A Pin, A Cork and a Card, and We Add Him to the Baker Street Collection."' , in *Insects in Literature*, pp. 163-78.

<sup>23</sup> Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Warner, p. 18.



Brian Stableford makes brief forays into insects in prose fiction in the entry on entomology in his *Science Fact and Science Fiction*, and Reaktion Books' pioneering animal series dedicates entire texts to one species at a time, however for each insect featured by Reaktion, just a small part is spent discussing their literary manifestations from Classical times to the present day.<sup>25</sup> Such broad brush-stroke approaches are not striving for detailed analysis of individual texts. Stableford's overview is by his own admission skewed towards the twentieth century in which—speaking mainly on the rhetoric of science fiction—he finds entomology to have been given undue prominence.<sup>26</sup>

Although it is no more significant as a scientific discipline than any other sector of the study of the diversity of living organisms, entomology has had a grossly disproportionate influence on the literary imaginary, especially in the recent production of monsters by their extreme magnification.<sup>27</sup>

Assuming Stableford to be correct, it begs the question why scant attention has been paid to insect imagery outside Science Fiction apart from the plethora of critical material relating to what Steven Connor calls 'the canonical insect text of modernism', Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.<sup>28</sup> This thesis withholds its contribution to analysis of *The Metamorphosis* until the latter part of the final chapter so as not to deviate from late nineteenth-century insects, where there exists something of a critical lacuna to be filled.

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<sup>25</sup> Brian Stableford, *Science Fact and Science Fiction: An Encyclopaedia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 157-60; Steven Connor, *Fly* (Reaktion, 2006); Marion Copeland, *Cockroach* (Reaktion, 2003); Adam Dodd, *Beetle* (Reaktion, 2015); Matthew Gandy, *Moth* (Reaktion, 2016); Richard Jones, *Mosquito* (Reaktion, 2012); Richard Jones, *Wasp* (Reaktion, 2019); Claire Preston, *Bee* (Reaktion, 2005); Klaus Rheinhardt, *Bedbug* (Reaktion, 2018); Charlotte Sleigh, *Ant* (Reaktion, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Discussed in a series of conversations between Stableford and me at London Science Fiction Research Community's *Sublime Cognition* Conference in September 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Stableford, p. 157.

<sup>28</sup> Steven Connor, 'As Entomate as Intimate could Pinchably Be', *Modernist Transactions*, Paper for *Modern Transactions Conference* University of Birmingham, 30 June 2000, <<http://stevenconnor.com/insects.html>> [accessed 25 June 2021].

The field of pre-Modernist bug studies is not completely barren. It is dotted with eusocial insect investigations such as Charlotte Sleight's analyses of ants in Wells's fiction and Christopher Hollingsworth's *The Poetics of the Hive*.<sup>29</sup> Franziska Kohlt's short article for the Royal Entomological Society highlights the nineteenth-century insect obsession and her research positions entomological imagery in relation to Lewis Carroll and Charles Kingsley, but the bugs are only a part of their texts and not their centre.<sup>30</sup> *Bugs and the Victorians* by John Mcdiarmid Clark constitutes a detailed and extensive summation of nineteenth-century entomology, but Clark's is a work of historiography not literature. In her review of it, Sleight, though fulsome in her praise, laments the fact it pays 'little attention to the vast array of popular entomological literature extant in the Victorian era'.<sup>31</sup> This thesis begins to redress the balance by supplementing more canonical insect texts with populist bug books of the nineteenth century while still recognising the commercial success of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) which sold out on its first day of release, and John Lubbock's *Ants, Bees and Wasps* (1882) which was into its eighteenth edition by 1929 and promoted by public lectures making it accessible to a burgeoning scientific community and enthusiastic amateurs alike.<sup>32</sup>

In the preface to *Ants, Wasps and Bees*, Lubbock explains how dabbing paint on the back of an ant or snipping off a fragment of a bee's wing allows him to monitor

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<sup>29</sup> Charlotte Sleight, 'Empire of the Ants: H. G. Wells and Tropical Entomology', *Science as Culture* 10 (2001), 33-71; Charlotte Sleight, *Six Legs Better: A Cultural History of Myrmecology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007); Christopher Hollingsworth, *The Poetics of the Hive: The Insect Metaphor in Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Franziska Kohlt, 'How Nineteenth Century Britain Became Obsessed with Insects' <<https://www.insectweek.co.uk/news/creepy-victorians>> [accessed 25 June 2021]. Kohlt only devotes a very short paragraph to Marsh.

<sup>31</sup> John F. Mcdiarmid Clark, *Bugs and the Victorians* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2009); Charlotte Sleight, 'Review of *Bugs and the Victorians*, by John. F. Mcdiarmid, Clark', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 43.2 (2010), 310-311.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection, Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859); BBC, 'Darwin: On the Origin of Species', *In Our Time* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00gd3wy>> [accessed 25 June 2021]; John Lubbock, *Ants, Bees and Wasps* [1882] (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1893). According to Clark, p. 98, Queen Victoria requested Lubbock send her a copy of *Ants, Bees and Wasps* in February 1887.

the behaviour of an individual the better to elucidate the workings of the hive. He emphasises this ‘mode of experimenting has differed from that of previous observers.’<sup>33</sup> I mimic Lubbock’s methodology and apply it in combination with Brown’s ‘foregrounding of a central text’ to situate, not a background buzz or eusocial group of ants or bees, but one single insect as a ‘literary device’.<sup>34</sup>

Nineteenth-century entomological understanding was dictated by what had preceded it. A very early source is Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia* (1665) in which he scrutinises individual insects down the barrel of a microscope, comments on this exercise and illustrates his findings with detailed sketches.<sup>35</sup> Hooke’s analysis of the visible, intricate differences between living organisms enabled the process of taxonomic classification of animals and plants set out by Carl Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae* in which he sub-divides the arthropod phylum into classes of which *Insecta* or *Hexapoda* make up the largest one.<sup>36</sup> The more frequently used Latinate name reflects the fact mature insects have segmented exoskeletal bodies while the Greek name points to their six feet on jointed legs. The determining factor for their further subdivision is wing structure as Linnaeus arranges insects into seven orders and adds the Greek suffix “*ptera*” meaning wing to each of their descriptive names. Linnean taxonomy categorises the largest order of insects as beetles, called *Coleoptera* for their hardened sheath-like forewings or elytra. Each order is narrowed further through family and genus to the lowest rank, that of species, which is precisely identified by binomial nomenclature still in widespread use today.<sup>37</sup>

Darwin, who continues to have beetles named after him such as the Costa Rican dung beetle *Canthidium darwini* (2009) and Argentinian *Darwinius sedarsi*

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<sup>33</sup> Lubbock, p vi.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, *Introduction* p xix.

<sup>35</sup> R. Hooke, Fellow of the Royal Society, *Micrographia* (London: Jo. Martyn and Jo. Allestry, Printers to the Royal Society, 1665).

<sup>36</sup> Caroli Linnaei, *Systema Naturae*, 10<sup>th</sup> edn (Stockholm, 1758); Carl Linnaeus, *A General System of Nature through the Three Grand Kingdoms of Animals, Vegetables, and Minerals*, trans. by William Turton (London: Lackington, Allen and Co., 1802).

<sup>37</sup> Linnaeus (i), pp. 342-433; Mary P. Windsor, ‘The Development of Linnaean Insect Classification’, *Taxon*, 25.1 (1976), 57–67.

(2014), was a longstanding beetle enthusiast and collector, demonstrating what Cannon Schmitt identifies as intense 'emotional-corporeal aspects of beetlemania'.<sup>38</sup> Darwin's autobiography contains an anecdote showing both his ardour for the insects in his student days at Cambridge, and the bugs' revenge:

one day, on tearing off some old bark, I saw two rare beetles, and seized one in each hand; then I saw a third and new kind, which I could not bear to lose, so that I popped the one which I held in my right hand into my mouth. Alas! It injected some intensely acrid fluid, which burnt my tongue so that I was forced to spit the beetle out, which was lost, as was the third.<sup>39</sup>

Whether the beetle acted out of fear or instinct is unclear, but its defence mechanism was successful and doubtless prevented it later being gassed and pinned.

So far as beetles in fiction are concerned, two out of three early insect tales feature them, but those are short stories not altogether focused on their bugs. Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Gold Bug' (1843) is less concerned with the living creature than the solving of a cryptogram; 'The Sphinx' (1846) is a mere fragment about a misconceived moth; and A. G. Gray Jun.'s 'The Blue Beetle: A Confession' (1857) is centred on scientific self-reproach at the accidental creation of a homicidal scarab.<sup>40</sup> Sara Coleridge's *Phantasmion* (1837) is a full-length story about a young prince endowed with insectile powers by Potentilla 'queen of the insect realm'.<sup>41</sup> At first sight it might appear eminently suitable as a test for the sympathetic literary insect, however closer inspection rules it out. Lauded as a pioneering fantasy for young adults, it is primarily a heroic quest with a confusion of dismantled insects doing little more than providing

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<sup>38</sup> 'Dung Beetle Named After Darwin' (22 September 2009) <<https://phys.org/news/2009-09-dung-beetle-darwin.html>> [accessed 25 August 2021]; Schmitt, 'Victorian Beetlemania', p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Kenneth G. V. Smith, 'Darwin's Insects: Charles Darwin's entomological notes', *Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History) Historical Series*, 14.1, 1-143 <[darwin-online.org.uk](http://darwin-online.org.uk)> [accessed 25 June 2021].

<sup>40</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Gold Bug', *Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper* (21 June, 28 June 1843); Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Sphinx', *Arthur's Ladies Magazine* (1846); A. G. Gray Jun., 'The Blue Beetle: A Confession', *The Train: A First Class Magazine*, 3.13 (January 1857), 55-62.

<sup>41</sup> Sara Coleridge, *Phantasmion* (London: William Pickering, 1837), p.11.

accoutrements for Phantasmion as the fairy equips him for success through a series of marvellous transformations. He acquires butterfly wings; sucker-feet of flies; vaulting skills of grasshoppers; vast insect pinions; the drum of a magnified cicada in his abdomen; an impregnable warrior-ant helmet; the hard black wings of water-beetles; and a glowing dragonfly exoskeleton. Enhanced strength and the capacity for flying bring him intense pleasure in hybridity, but the plot takes a darker turn in the 'abasement' resulting from his complete metamorphosis into a 'monstrous', dirt-dwelling bug in which 'every vestige of his human form disappeared'.<sup>42</sup> The invitation to the reader is to pity him for this 'hideous mask'.<sup>43</sup> I eliminated Coleridge's book as a core text because its insects are merely plundered for spare parts, however it is worthy of mention here for the inarticulate agony of Phantasmion's short-lived, abject state as a bug in entirety who cannot access speech.

Sustained and consistent insect imagery in *The Beetle*, and its late-Victorian publication date make it the obvious choice for analysis. That it foregrounds an insect of the largest taxonomic order is fortuitous. That it is written in the Gothic genre which typically tends to draw on insect connotations of death, disease, and alien otherness is likely to make the task of finding sympathy for the bug in the book a greater challenge. An abjected insect made frighteningly horrific to generate entomophobic responses may unintentionally contribute to a disastrous environmental effect and participate in incidental xenophobia. To re-biologise the insect in *The Beetle* places greater emphasis on its own animality, independent of being, in Margot Norris's words, 'pressed into symbolic service as metaphors'.<sup>44</sup> Inevitably the scarab's status as a real creature co-exists with its function as a rhetorical device. In balancing those twin aspects, this thesis nudges the boundaries of scholarship outwards offering a differently nuanced reading of Marsh's most famous work.

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<sup>42</sup> Coleridge, pp. 328, 332, 329.

<sup>43</sup> Coleridge, p. 329.

<sup>44</sup> Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1985), p. 25.

Eric Brown observes: ‘insects have repeatedly been fusion points for the world of science and letters’, and he cites many who have ‘cross-pollinated the entomological and literary fields’.<sup>45</sup> Warner describes Vladimir Nabokov as ‘uniquely both distinguished lepidopterist and fabulist’, someone who most successfully merges the two disciplines in his writing and critical insights.<sup>46</sup> Nabokov’s own novels are too late for the purposes of this thesis, but in addressing *The Beetle*, I respond to his advocacy for readers to have or to develop ‘the best temperament [...] a combination of the artistic and the scientific one’.<sup>47</sup> Living creatures cannot survive in a vacuum, and fictional insects likewise inhabit a complex ecosystem scientifically, historically, spatially, politically, artistically, religiously, personally, and emotionally composed, and in which associations and assumptions develop. It seems fitting therefore to adopt a critical approach to Marsh’s novel founded on the application of cultural entomology.

Cultural entomology is a very specific area of research established by Charles L. Hogue in 1987 as a separate discipline from ethno-entomology (concerned with human insect interactions in ‘so-called primitive societies’); applied entomology (primarily agricultural or disease management); and entomophagy (eating bugs), unless any of the above are used ceremonially, recreationally or in a literary context.<sup>48</sup> Hogue includes arachnids and myriapods under the umbrella term. By 2004 Brian Morris limits it to insects alone, and in *Insects and Human Life*, discusses cultural entomology as a combination of entomological, ecological, and anthropological concepts.<sup>49</sup> Morris’s more zoologically precise interpretation accords with this thesis’ framing of *The Beetle* within the wider discussion of preconceived bias against insects irrespective of spiders.

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<sup>45</sup> Brown, p. x.

<sup>46</sup> Warner, p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (London: Mariner Books, 1982), pp. 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> Charles L. Hogue, ‘Cultural Entomology’, *Annual Review of Entomology*, 32 (January 1987), 181-99 (p. 181).

<sup>49</sup> Brian Morris, ‘Cultural Entomology’, in Brian Morris, *Insects and Human Life* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 181-216.

Ron Cherry in the *Encyclopaedia of Entomology* defines cultural entomology as ‘the study of the influence of insects [...] in literature, languages, music, the arts, interpretive history, religion, and recreation’, and Cherry’s is closest to my interpretation of the discipline or ‘interdiscipline’.<sup>50</sup> Together with Gene Kritsky, Cherry presents an overarching view of cultural entomology in *Insect Mythology*, a bold endeavour and valuable resource which merges data on insect-centred myths and legends pulled from numerous anthropologists, historians, and entomologists working from the end of the nineteenth century to the latter part of the twentieth.<sup>51</sup> What emerges from this quantitative analysis conveniently summarised in tabular form is that Coleoptera are associated with cosmogeny or creation myths and stories of metamorphosis across three continents, and that they have positive associations across four continents.<sup>52</sup> Nowhere do beetles have negative mythological associations, and they are the sole insect group for which this is the case. Kritsky and Cherry omit any reference to the Colorado beetle responsible for the destruction of potato crops in the 1860s and 1870s and do not mention the boll weevil which wiped out cotton crops in the 1920s. It is possible they adopt this position because the activities of those species are the province of fact not folklore. Even allowing for a degree of subjectivity on the part of the authors, their findings indicate beetles are traditionally the least unsympathetic insects. While this is not the same as being the most sympathetic, it offers encouragement to my endeavour centred on a *fin-de-siècle* novel about a beetle.

There are only two critics in Elizabeth Effinger and Pandora Sypersek who significantly address the over-privileging of the human in Marsh analysis by bringing the insect further to the fore, and my second and third chapters will engage further

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<sup>50</sup> Ron Cherry, ‘Cultural Entomology’, in *Encyclopaedia of Entomology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, ed. by John L. Capinera (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), p. 1,133.

<sup>51</sup> Gene Kritsky and Ron Cherry, *Insect Mythology* (Lincoln NE, Writers Club Press, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> Kritsky and Cherry, Table 2, p. 35; Table 3, p. 36.

with Effinger's 'Insect Politics' and Syperek's 'Trans-animality'.<sup>53</sup> One observation of Effinger, however, is worth mentioning in this introduction for its pertinence to my overall argument, and it is her comment: 'extreme hyper-entomophobic responses to the beetle [sic] is the affective force within Marsh's novel'.<sup>54</sup> Testing the negative affect of the insect and occasionally challenging it is the business of this thesis. Situated as Effinger's and Syperek's essays are in more general critical anthologies, they are constrained in their development of inter-disciplinary and inter-textual resonances of *The Beetle*, yet surprisingly, given space is at a premium, they do not maintain a sharp focus on Marsh's insect being a scarab. Effinger takes a lengthy detour into eighteenth-century performing bees, and Syperek deviates into a discussion on praying mantises devouring male mates, and the hive minds of eusocial insects. Marsh's creature is declaredly none of those. The new niche carved out by this thesis is species precision, commitment to cultural entomology and sympathetic concerns.

Nineteenth-century investigations into insects include Acheta Domestica's series of *Episodes of Insect Life* (1849, 1850 and 1851) which in its third volume describes the Egyptian scarabaeus in disparaging terms:

in form dark and repulsive, in habits dull and laborious; its abode beneath the earth, or within the loathsome substances which cumber earth's surface, and its favourite atmosphere one of steaming fetidity thence exhaled. [...] Yet this, the *Scarabaeus sacer*, or Sacred Beetle was the creature which the wise and civilised Egyptian [...] adored as a deity.

What lamentable darkness! We are ready to exclaim looking back with contemptuous pity.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Effinger, 'Insect Politics in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', in *Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by L. Mazzeno & R. Morrison (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 251-68; Pandora Syperek, 'Gendered Metamorphoses in the Natural History Museum and Trans-Animality in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', in *Victorians and their Animals: Beast on a Leash*, ed. by Brenda Ayres (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 163-87.

<sup>54</sup> Effinger, 'Insect Politics', p.257. The absence of a capitalised 'B' may be a typographical error or may suggest she is contemplating the beetle as insect and not textual character. Throughout this thesis *The Beetle* italicised refers to the book, 'the Beetle' with a capital 'B' to its central entity, and beetle in lower case to the natural creature.

<sup>55</sup> Acheta Domestica, *Episodes of Insect Life* (London: Reeve and Benham, 1851), p. 111.



Despite the heavy criticism of the sacred scarab of antiquity with which I shall engage in the next section, there is grudging recognition of its ‘usefulness as an insect scavenger’, and a recapitulation of Mouffet’s view that the English species acts as an invitation to ‘labour, temperance, prudence, justice, modesty [...] and showing how a beetle can luxuriate in a bed of dung, just as well as in a bed of roses’.<sup>56</sup> *Acheta Domestica* cannot resist following this with another negative imputation of the creature, this time as emblematic of the sordid accumulation of wealth exemplified in the image of Figure 0:1.

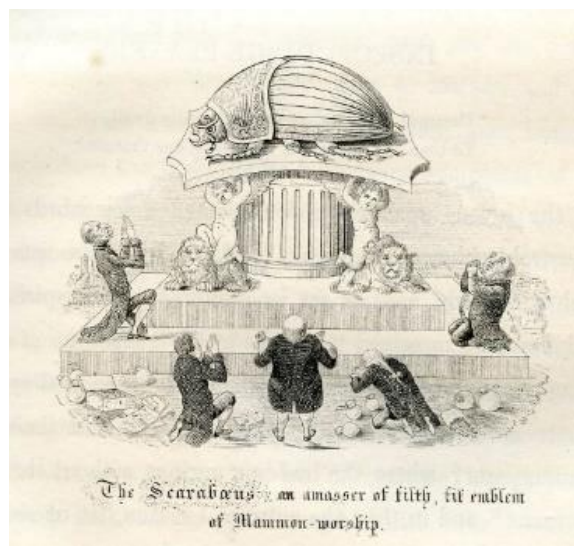


Figure 0:1

The Scarabaeus: amasser of filth,  
fit emblem of Mammon worship

*Acheta Domestica, Episodes of  
Insect Life*

(London: Reeve and Benham,  
1851), p.125

Other instances of writing on insects interacting with human culture include: Frank Cowan’s *Curious Facts in the History of Insects* (1865), which opens with a chapter on beetles; Angelo de Gubernatis’s *Zoological Mythology* (1872); and Rev J. G. Wood’s *Insects Abroad* (1883).<sup>57</sup> Cowan and Gubernatis focus on the always feminised, red, seven-spotted ladybird linked with the Virgin Mary across centuries in the Christian tradition, a status reflected in the German name *Marienkäfer* (Mary’s

<sup>56</sup> *Domestica* (1851), pp. 114-115.

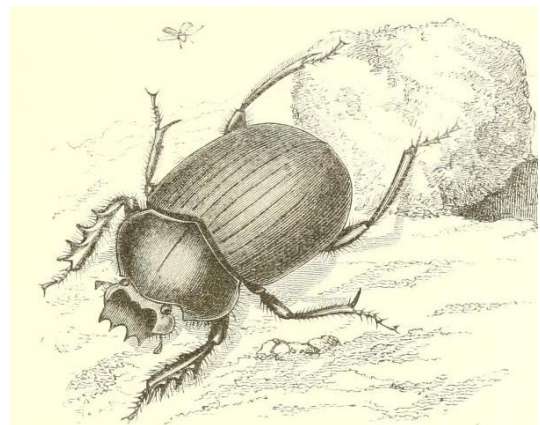
<sup>57</sup> Frank Cowan, *Curious Facts in the History of Insects, Including Spiders and Scorpions* (Philadelphia PA: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1865), pp. 17-75; Angelo de Gubernatis, *Zoological Mythology or The Legends of Animals* (London: Trübner & Co, 1872); Rev. J. G. Wood, *Insects Abroad* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1874).

beetle), the French, *bête de la Vierge* (Virgin's animal), and the 'lady' prefix in English and American variants. The ladybird's divine glory is, however, only borrowed. Steven Connor notes just one exception to the lamentable dearth of insect totems and that is the *Scarabaeus sacer* or common Egyptian dung beetle: a deity in its own right.<sup>58</sup> The point is also made by Yves Cambefort's essay 'Beetles as Religious Symbols', in which he recognises the scarab as mythologically unique.<sup>59</sup> Reverend Wood, while talking in the nineteenth century of the sacred scarab's adoption into the polytheistic religion of Ancient Egypt, analogises the 'love' of the female of the species for her 'earthen ball' to 'the Creator's love towards His creatures'.<sup>60</sup> Like Mouffet, Wood finds a Christian message of protectiveness and perseverance in her rolling her burden. Figure 0:2 shows the illustration of the Sacred Scarabaeus accompanying Wood's sympathetic narrative.

Figure 0:2

Sacred Scarabaeus

J. G. Wood, *Insects Abroad* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1874), p. 111



Building on the legacies of Hooke and Linnaeus, scientists and natural historians were contributing to cumulative thought about insects throughout the nineteenth century alongside philosophers and churchmen. A further example of the latter's output is 'Life Compared to Insect Metamorphoses' (1887), which discusses

<sup>58</sup> Connor, 'As Entomate as Intimate'; Cowan devotes a lengthy section to scarabs of myth, fable, and Ancient Egypt, pp. 26-45.

<sup>59</sup> Yves Cambefort, 'Beetles as Religious Symbols', *Cultural Entomology Digest* 1 (1993). Cambefort theorises the shape of the mummy visually and metaphorically represents the chrysalis stage before emergence into renewed life.

<sup>60</sup> Wood, pp. 110-17 (p. 113).

the human body as a grub, the grave as a chrysalis and the immortal human soul as an imago.<sup>61</sup> In their ideas, deliverers of sermons, observers of insects in the field or researchers in the laboratory sometimes converged, but often clashed. There is no merit in re-writing Clark's seminal *Bugs and the Victorians* or paraphrasing Cannon Schmitt's 'Victorian Beetlemania' in this introduction. What it does is gratefully acknowledge them as invaluable historicist sources for its drawing out of some significant concepts and personalities in nineteenth-century entomology

The same year the Linnaean Society obtained its Royal Charter, William Paley's *Natural Theology* was published, espousing a creationist position and presenting the exquisite mechanisms of living things as evidence of God, a divine watchmaker.<sup>62</sup> Although Paley devotes a chapter to insects, he effectively sets Linnaeus aside, being more concerned with the organisms' theological significance than with establishing their fixed position within a grid system. Oxford University Press's re-printed *Natural Theology* describes Paley's text as 'one of the most published books of the nineteenth century'.<sup>63</sup> Its success appears to have been unaffected by a high price limiting its market to the nobility and gentry. In contrast, when William Kirby and William Spence published their seventh 'people's edition' of *Introduction to Entomology* in 1856, they made it available at one sixth the cost of the previous edition, explicitly 'to bring it within reach of all desirous of becoming acquainted with the Natural History of Insects'.<sup>64</sup> Kirby and Spence decried previous entomological works as having been too expensive and unattractive. The front cover of their publication shown in Figure 0:3 bears a striking embossed gold beetle on a dark green background.

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<sup>61</sup> Leo H. Grindon, 'Life Compared to Insect Metamorphoses', *Sheffield Independent*, 21 May 1887, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*. [1802] (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> 'Introduction', in *Natural Theology*, pp. xxix, xxiii.

<sup>64</sup> William Kirby and William Spence, *An Introduction to Entomology*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1856), 'Advertisement to this Seventh Edition'.



Figure 0:3

William Kirby & William Spence, *Introduction to Entomology*.

(London: Longman, Green and Co., 1856)

*Introduction to Entomology* was the leading entomological text on both sides of the Atlantic for over a generation. It takes the form of a first-person series of letters to an imaginary young naturalist. Its preface and second letter defend the scientific discipline of studying subjects of diminutive size by claiming it trains minds, develops observational skills, is not cruel, involves far more than naming and classifying, and, where Parson Kirby's religion reveals itself, brings those who study miraculous insects to a greater awareness of God.<sup>65</sup> Religion and accessibility do not compromise seriousness, scientific rigour, or comprehensiveness. Subsequent letters cover: insect metamorphoses; injurious insects preying on livestock and man; insects causing damage to agriculture and horticulture; acting as vectors of disease; and beneficial insects such as bees and beetles. Other letters consider: insect offspring care; food sources; habitations and societies; aggressions and defence mechanisms; motions, noises, and hibernations; instincts and reason. What thoughts an insect might experience is a subject to which John Lubbock returns in *Ants Bees and Wasps* and re-works in his pamphlet *Can Insects Reason?*<sup>66</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century the question as to the degree of insect sentience was much debated.

<sup>65</sup> Kirby and Spence pp. ix-x; pp. 11-30.

<sup>66</sup> John Lubbock, *Can Insects Reason?* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1902).

Entomological discourse at this point was far wider than a rigid sorting of animal subjects solely according to external criteria. It incorporated behavioural traits and the internal workings of insect bodies stimulating interest in comparative anatomy, variability, transfiguration, and the possibility of perfectibility within species. In Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), Schmitt identifies an 'affective epistemology: a way of knowing beetles', synecdochic of the relation between man's evolution from lower life forms.<sup>67</sup> He neatly summarises the position. 'After Darwin and Wallace, knowing beetles is knowing one's relatives—and no longer entirely distinguishable from knowing oneself'.<sup>68</sup> If entomophobia is terror of insects as the epitome of the anti-human, evolutionary thought is appreciation of insects as proto-human, and beetlemania an obsession with them. Out of the research of Wallace and Darwin arose the concept of a continuum between species stretching from the smallest life forms to man, which Schmitt summarises as 'the transformation of what had been radically unlike humans (beetles say) into kin'.<sup>69</sup> Kinship plays an important role in the experience of sympathy, and it is an idea which I shall develop in the third section of this introduction prior to engaging with Marsh's text.

Lubbock and T. H. Huxley positioned themselves as proponents of scientific naturalism and active experimentation rather than practising passive observation or obsessive collecting and classification. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* contrasts Lubbock with the 'systematists', describing him as a 'philosophical naturalist' whose meticulous comparison of the internal organs of multiple specimens drew Darwin's attention to an absence of uniformity in some of the same species. He discusses the difficulty of attempting to fix "protean" or "polymorphic" genera of insects and raises

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<sup>67</sup> Schmitt, 'Victorian Beetlemania' p. 35.

<sup>68</sup> Schmitt, 'Victorian Beetlemania', pp. 37-8.

<sup>69</sup> See for example: Alfred Russel Wallace, *On the Tendencies of Varieties to Depart Indefinitely from the Original Type*

<[http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/essays/Wallace\\_On\\_the\\_Tendency\\_of\\_Varieties.htm](http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/essays/Wallace_On_the_Tendency_of_Varieties.htm)> [accessed 17 September 2021]; Schmitt, 'Victorian Beetlemania', p. 37.

the question to what extent significant variation within species might cause them to be reclassified as different species. The process of continuous evolving causes an apparent blurring of Linnaean lines of division. At the extremity of varietal difference, Darwin finds organisms, either naturally occurring or resulting from artificial selection, so far from the species norm they may be called “monstrosities”.

Darwin demonstrates how variation within a species, no matter to what degree it occurs, offers an advantage in the struggle for existence:

it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be NATURALLY SELECTED.<sup>70</sup>

To strengthen his argument, he refers to the research of Lubbock, T. H. Huxley and Joseph Hooker as well as other botanists and entomologists including the religious Kirby. Across the nineteenth century, entomology was embodied in natural theology, natural philosophy, and natural selection, and these positions co-existed sometimes in harmony and sometimes in tension. The publication of *Origin of Species* was a watershed moment in the consideration of living creatures in an ecological network situated horizontally in relationship to one another and vertically in an evolutionary chain stretching back to their own antecedents and forward to unknown descendants. When Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford criticised *Origin of Species* in the Oxford Evolution debate of 1860, Huxley, who came to be known as Darwin’s bulldog, and Hooker were vociferous in their support of Darwinian secularism. Enthusiastic Darwinists were part of a closely interconnected community of like-minded thinkers, and in 1864 Huxley, Hooker, Lubbock, Herbert Spencer and five other eminent scientists united to form the ‘X Club’ to cross-pollinate ideas and promote their ground-breaking scientific research. In that same year Spencer published his *Principles*

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<sup>70</sup> Darwin, ‘Introduction’, *Origin of Species*.

of *Biology* and coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest', which Darwin would later credit and adopt.<sup>71</sup>

My interpretation of *The Beetle* is informed by scientific concepts permeating the public imagination including: spatial and temporal relationships of organisms to one another; atavism; kinship; competition for resources; fitness in the biological sense of producing successful offspring; monstrosity; and insect sentience. As I have discussed, nineteenth-century populist entomological publications commented on the sacred nomenclature of the dung beetle, and the associated mythology stemming from a region whose resources Britain sought to appropriate and control is highly relevant to my reading of Marsh's Egyptian Gothic. In preparation for approaching his text, I now situate the scarab in the context of Ancient Egyptian Beliefs.

### The Scarab God

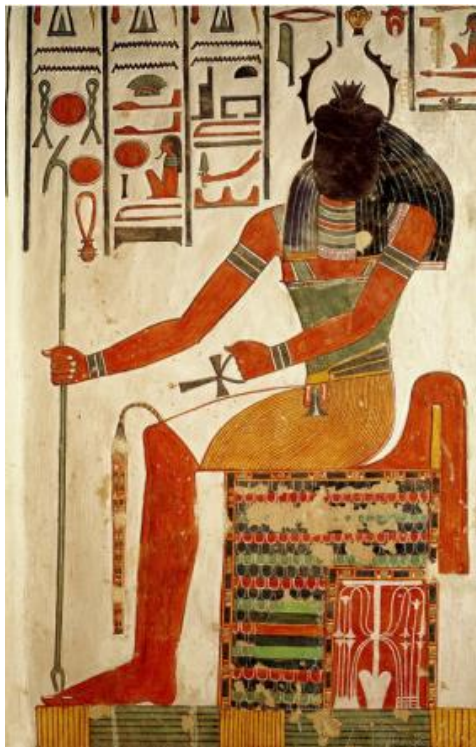


Figure 0:4

Seated Khepri

Detail: Wall Painting

Tomb of Queen Nefertari

Luxor, Egypt

<sup>71</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Biology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), p. 444; Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn, p. 72.

Alongside Marsh's authorial manipulation of entomophobia and Beetlemania which I shall demonstrate in the body of the thesis, there co-exist echoes of Egyptophilia built around Khepri, the sympathetic deity modelled on the common Egyptian dung beetle, which accounts for the creature's taxonomic classification of *Scarabaeus sacer* or sacred scarab.<sup>72</sup> To cement a foundation on which to build later discussions of *The Beetle*, the focus now turns to Egyptology and insect iconography, especially as the scarab of the far 'then' was received and recycled by the nearer 'then' of the *fin de siècle*.

According to Ludwig Keimer, who worked with Egyptian antiquities in Cairo in the early twentieth century, Flinders Petrie (1863-1942) claimed to have found a container of dried dung beetles in a predynastic grave, indicating the creatures were treasured from as long ago as seven thousand years.<sup>73</sup> Egyptologist Percy Newberry was sceptical about the accuracy of this assertion because not a single scarab was discovered either during the excavations of cemeteries from the Sixth to Eleventh Dynasties at Beni Hassan or at Dendera. Newberry maintained the scarab only came into common usage as a religious symbol from the Twelfth Dynasty onwards (1991-1783 BCE). The *Scarabaeus sacer* image is identified in Newberry's 1905 *Ancient Egyptian Scarabs* as having been used as seal, hieroglyph, amulet, religious symbol in wall art and in documents, as commemorative device, and as adornment.<sup>74</sup> If mounted as a ring for the living or the mummified, it was worn on the forefinger of the left hand, believed to contain a nerve directly connected to the heart. Knowledge such as this passed over into fiction. Theophile Gautier's Prologue to *The Romance of a Mummy* (1886) describes exactly one such item worn in such a way: 'on the index of the left hand shone a small scarabaeus of golden cloisonné enamel, which formed

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<sup>72</sup> Elaine Altman Evans, 'The Sacred Scarab', *McClung Museum* (01 January 1996) <<https://mcclungmuseum.utk.edu/1996/01/01/sacred-scarab/>> [accessed 25 June 2021].

<sup>73</sup> Ludwig Keimer, *Insectes de L'Egypte Ancienne* (Cairo: L'Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1938).

<sup>74</sup> Percy E. Newberry, *Ancient Egyptian Scarabs: An Introduction to Egyptian Seals and Signet Rings* [London 1905] (Chicago Ill: Ares Publishers, 1979).



a seal ring and was held in place by a gold thread most marvellously plaited.<sup>75</sup> Scarabs were used for prayers and good luck charms by rich and poor alike for thousands of years, and the materials from which they were made varied from semi-precious or ordinary stones, faience or wood, to precious or common metals.<sup>76</sup> Many examples were on public display at the time *The Beetle* was written.

The key identifier of the *Scarabaeus sacer* or dung beetle is its habit of rolling a huge ball of manure along the ground and up steep slopes. Observing this behaviour, ancient Egyptians imagined a giant scarab propelled the glowing sphere of the sun across the sky from east to west, an activity which, when coupled with the assumed supernatural emergence of beetle hatchlings from the earth, caused them to be associated with the rising sun and rebirth. The sacred beetle is the creature in whom entomology and Egyptology collide, featuring in publications of both disciplines. John Ward comments on it in *The Sacred Beetle* of 1902.

There has been a suggestion that the sacred character attached to this insect may have arisen from the habit of the dung beetle of laying its eggs in a small pellet of dirt, rolling with its antennae till it assumes the shape of a ball [...] and then burying it in the sand. After a time the sun's rays hatch out the egg, and the creature thus seems to emerge alive [...] So the Egyptians, being poor entomologists, may have supposed that the beetle had the power of revivifying itself after death.<sup>77</sup>

As a result of this misconception, Khepri became an important deity, sometimes represented as entirely beetle and sometimes human with a scarab in lieu of a face. One of the finest examples of the hybrid depiction is the religious wall painting on the tomb of Queen Nefertari in the Valley of the Queens at Luxor. Figure 0:4 shows the

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<sup>75</sup> Theophile Gautier, *The Romance of a Mummy*, trans. by M. Young (London: John and Robert Maxwell, 1886), p. 63.

<sup>76</sup> Subtle changes in scarab design throughout pharaonic dynasties enabled archaeologists to date them.

<sup>77</sup> John Ward and F. Llewellyn Griffith, *The Sacred Beetle: A Popular Treatise on Egyptian Scarabs in Art and History* (London: John Murray, 1902), p. 3. Griffith translates the hieroglyphics. The commentary is Ward's.

seated god holding the ankh and the kingship accoutrements of crook and flail. They emphasise how he is at once eternal and powerful.

Figure 0:5

Detail: Painted and Gilded Wooden  
Inner Coffin of Hornedjitef,  
British Museum, London



Figure 0:6

Hieroglyphics Featuring Scarabs,  
British Museum, London

Khepri's image appears on the papyri of the priests, as well as on nineteenth-century artefact acquisitions including coffins and hieroglyphics, of which two photographs from the British Museum are shown in Figures 0:5 and 0:6.<sup>78</sup> Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge (1857-1934) became the Museum's curator of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in 1894, where he remained for thirty years and was hugely influential in disseminating knowledge of Ancient Egypt beyond the specialist community of academics and archaeologists to a wider audience. Across 1894-1895 he translated *The Book of the Dead* from *The Papyrus of Ani*, a scribe's composition giving detailed instructions for passing into the afterlife containing chanting by

<sup>78</sup> Photographed 24 February 2015.

Khepri.<sup>79</sup> It was acquired by the Trustees of the British Museum in 1888, and in parallel with translating *The Book of the Dead*, Budge was writing *The Mummy: Chapters on Egyptian Funerary Archaeology*, in which he describes three classes of scarab: funereal scarabs including heart scarabs; ornamental scarabs; and historical scarabs.<sup>80</sup>

Heart scarabs are oval, semi-precious stones carved into the image of a dung beetle and placed in the chest cavity of the royal and wealthy at mummification, replacing the human heart removed as part of the embalming process.<sup>81</sup> Heart scarabs are large and can measure as much as twelve centimetres. Additional smaller scarabs might also be inserted in the mummy wrappings or hung around the neck of the deceased. Usually the inscription on the underside of the heart scarab is a spell or prayer from chapter XXXB of *The Book of the Dead* asking the heart not to stand as witness against the deceased at the time of judgement in the underworld when it is weighed against the feather of Ma'at on the scales of truth and justice. Stylistically, the wings on heart scarabs are carved folded into the beetle's body making a compact rounded shape, and it was not until the Twenty-third Dynasty (828-712 BCE) that the broader winged pectoral scarabs representing a beetle in full flight were placed on top of the mummy. Torquay Museum exhibits a magnificent example of a pectoral scarab on the mummified body of a young boy shown in Figure 0:7.<sup>82</sup> Symbolic and ritualistic usage of scarabs exemplifies their sympathetic value to the Ancient Egyptians for thousands of years, and their portability made them practical souvenirs for western nineteenth-century travellers to Egypt.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead* (London 1894-895) <[www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Egyptian-Book-of-the-Dead.pdf](http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Egyptian-Book-of-the-Dead.pdf)> [accessed 27 June 2021].

<sup>80</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Mummy: Chapters on Egyptian Funerary Archaeology* (Cambridge, CUP, 1893), p. 234.

<sup>81</sup> Four sons of Horus had responsibility for canopic jars containing organs: hawk-headed Qebehsenuef for the intestines; Baboon-headed Hapy for the lungs; jackal-headed Duamutef for the stomach; and human-headed Imsety for the liver. None of the jars contained the heart.

<sup>82</sup> Photographed 25 May 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Budge, *Mummy*, p. 253.



Figure 0:7

Pectoral scarab and amulets of Horus on mummified boy aged 2-4 (713-332 BCE)

Torquay Museum Ref. A5546

Scarabs with extensive inscriptions on their reverse were used to celebrate important events, and this was something particularly associated with Amenhotep III, Tutankhamun's grandfather, and the regal subject of the eighteen-metre-high colossi at Thebes.<sup>84</sup> His commemorative scarabs were of equally large proportions. Petrie comments in *Historical Scarabs* on his having issued them for such varied subjects as: the arrival of his bride Tiye; the construction of a lake in Thebes in her honour; to boast about the extent of his empire; and a wild animal hunt on which he slew one-hundred-and-two lions.<sup>85</sup> H. Rider Haggard in his novel *Cleopatra* (1889) uses the self-same scarab as exemplary of virile Pharaonic power.<sup>86</sup> *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* notes the Royal Lion-Hunt scarab was sold at Sotheby's for the princely sum of twelve pounds on 22 December 1891. On the death of its owner in 1897, it passed to Chester's Grosvenor Museum.<sup>87</sup> Ward and Griffith's *The Sacred Beetle*

<sup>84</sup> Amenhotep III ruled from 1391-1335 B.C.E.

<sup>85</sup> W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Historical Scarabs: A Series of Drawings from the Historical Collections Arranged Chronologically* (Chicago, Ill: Ares Publishing, 1889).

<sup>86</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Cleopatra* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1889).

<sup>87</sup> M. Jones, 'The Royal Lion-Hunt Scarab of Amenophis III in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 65 (1979), 165-66. Jones gives the size of 'The Royal Lion-Hunt Scarab as 8.3cm x 5.7cm x 3.7cm.

includes very detailed commentary on the function and markings of multiple scarabs. It illustrates them with faithful reproductions of hieroglyphics, intricate sketches, or photographic plates. Ward analogises the proclamation scarabs of Amenhotep III to a 'Royal Gazette' and adds the unusual largeness of the pieces was determined by the need to accommodate the wealth of detail.<sup>88</sup>

Scarabs of all sizes were appearing in factual and fictional texts, and the first British text to focus exclusively on scarabs alone was '*An Essay of Scarabs* by William John Loftie (1884) which Budge cites in *The Mummy*. Loftie, associate of Ward and Petrie, comments on the peculiar assistance of scarabs in deciphering the Ancient Egyptian past.

A collection of scarabs, inscribed with the names of kings, stands [...] to Egyptian history as a collection of coins stands to the younger nations of the earth. The day must come when our Universities and other bodies of learned folk, will study the beginnings of things as they are presented in Egyptian history, and some knowledge of these curious little objects will become indispensable to an educated man.<sup>89</sup>

These are Egyptian beetles presented as sympathetic to academia. Soon afterwards followed Budge's description of one-hundred-and-fifty scarabs in his *Catalogue of the Egyptian Collection of the Harrow School Museum* (1887) with translations of many hieroglyphs inscribed upon them.<sup>90</sup> Two years later, Petrie's *Historical Scarabs* (1889) gave over two thousand examples of incised scarabs, however Budge is critical of Petrie's book.

The idea of the work was excellent, but the plates should have contained a tolerably complete set of examples of scarabs, carefully indexed. The title *Historical Scarabs* was a misnomer for the only, strictly speaking, historical scarabs known, the series of the four of Amenophis III were omitted.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ward and Griffith, p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> William John Loftie, *An Essay of Scarabs* (London: Field and Tuer, 1884), pp. 30-31.

<sup>90</sup> E. A Wallis Budge, *Catalogue of the Egyptian Collection of the Harrow School Museum* (London: D. Nutt, 1887).

<sup>91</sup> Budge, *Mummy*, p. 247.

Five years after Petrie and just a decade after Loftie, Isaac Myer published his *Scarabs* (1894) in New York, a text which focussed among other things on the religious symbolism of the sacred beetle and its connection to the immortality of the soul.<sup>92</sup> Ever-increasing swiftness of transatlantic passage in the nineteenth century stimulated what was effectively an anglophone empire in which people, artefacts, information, opinion and books could easily be shared, justifying the inclusion of an American Egyptologist in what is primarily a study of British cultural history. By the time Ward composed his dedication to Petrie in *The Sacred Beetle* (1902), he reveals a keen awareness of *fin-de-siècle* interest in scarabs.

Petrie disdained Budge's methods of obtaining and transporting objects of antiquity and was rumoured to refer to the other man as 'Bugbear'.<sup>93</sup> Whatever degree of rivalry existed between them, both men collected, displayed, and wrote about Egyptian artefacts including scarabs. Both were highly influential on their contemporaries and on those who followed them. Both would receive knighthoods.<sup>94</sup> Petrie carried out multiple excavations in Egypt in the 1880s and 1890s, and Ward accompanied him on several digs. Petrie became the first UK Professor of Egyptology in 1892, taking up the chair at University College London endowed by Egyptologist and writer, Amelia Edwards.<sup>95</sup> The Petrie Museum continues to display many of his important finds such as the gilded wooden, winged scarab of Figure 0:8 together with its solar disc, and the pectoral scarab of Figure 0:9, both from the twenty-second dynasty.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Isaac Myer, *Scarabs: The History, Manufacture and Religious Symbolism of the Scarabaeus in Ancient Egypt, Phoenicia, Sardinia, Etruria Etc.* (New York: Edwin W. Dayton, 1894).

<sup>93</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Mummy's Curse: The True History of a Dark Fantasy* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2012), p. 56.

<sup>94</sup> Budge was knighted in 1920 and Petrie in 1923.

<sup>95</sup> Amelia Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1877).

<sup>96</sup> Photographed 24 November 2018.



Figure 0:8

Gilded wooden scarab with disc

Artefact ref. UC.29858A&B, The Petrie Museum, London



Figure 0:9

Winged pectoral scarab

Artefact ref. UC 37480-84, The Petrie Museum, London

Petrie's scarabs are interesting, but the ground floor of the British Museum houses the world's most impressive entomological artefact. It is a colossal scarab made of granite, shown in Figure 0:10. A pen and ink drawing of it forms the frontispiece to Ward and Griffith's *The Sacred Beetle*, and Ward refers to the statue's dimensions being eighty inches long and thirty-three inches high.<sup>97</sup> It was discovered in Constantinople and thought to have been transported there from the Ancient Egyptian city of Heliopolis, now buried on the north-eastern edge of modern-day

<sup>97</sup> Ward and Griffith, frontispiece. This roughly equates to 2 metres long and 0.84 metres high.

Cairo.<sup>98</sup> A similar scarab, not quite on the same grand scale as the one in London, remains in situ by the sacred lake at Karnak Temple.<sup>99</sup> The British Museum's exhibit is reputedly the oldest and largest surviving representation of a sacred scarab in the world. Its unique value has not gone unrecognised. Despite constraints of exhibition space and a plethora of Egyptian artefacts acquired in the main by Budge towards the close of the nineteenth century, the granite scarab is believed to have been on continuous public display for over two hundred years. It sits among sculptures that are from the same Egyptian provenance. Many are also on a vast scale and almost invariably carved from various kinds of rock. The huge Egyptian beetle therefore finds a home from home in the controlled museum space in London. The extent to which Marsh's entomological alien also makes herself at home in the metropolis is examined in my fourth chapter.

In *Conflicted Antiquities*, Elliott Colla speaks of the imperial backdrop to obtaining such large, foreign artefacts. 'For rising empires, both ancient and modern, Egypt has always been a symbol of ancient sovereignty whose power might be grasped through the acquisition (or reproduction) of its monumental objects'.<sup>100</sup> Colla is speaking of obelisks in London, Paris, Rome and Washington. His observation is equally valid for the colossal scarab bought from the Earl of Elgin for the British Museum in 1816 using a grant voted by Parliament.<sup>101</sup> The funding of its transport and its purchase speaks of religiously informed power relations, in which the Christian, British Empire exercises control over both the modern, Muslim, Ottoman Empire and the ancient, polytheistic, Pharaonic Empire.

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<sup>98</sup> Istanbul was formerly named Constantinople in honour of the Roman Emperor, Constantine. Prior to that it was known as Byzantium.

<sup>99</sup> I viewed the colossal stone scarab at Karnak Temple, Egypt in March 1989. See also Elizabeth Blyth, *Karnak: Evolution of a Temple* (London, Routledge, 2006), p. 111.

<sup>100</sup> Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (London: Duke UP, 2007), p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> 'Monumental Diorite Scarab Beetle' (British Museum)

<[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA74](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA74)> [accessed 25 June 2021] British Museum online.





Figure 0:10

Colossal Granite Scarab, British Museum, London

Left: Photograph (2018)

Right: Ward and Griffith's Frontispiece to *The Sacred Beetle* (1903)

The statue brought into being through human labour is the representation of godlike power and insect life 'congealed in the stone': a monument to workers, worshippers, priests, and the natural creature.<sup>102</sup> The scarab is embroiled with human social, cultural, religious, and political associations, yet it is distinctly non-human in that it is inanimate and entomological. It embodies contradictions, and Marsh's text about a second colossal scarab coexisting in *fin-de-siècle* London can be understood to constitute a secondary or tertiary artefact in relation to this ancient material object.

The colossal, granite scarab is in honour of Khepri, one of seventy-three gods identified by nineteenth-century Egyptologist John Gardner Wilkinson in *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*.<sup>103</sup> Etymologically speaking 'Khepri', along with the alternative spellings of 'Khepera', 'Khepra', 'Kheper' and 'Chepria' derives from the word '*cheper*' for 'coming into being', 'changing state' or 'transforming'.<sup>104</sup> Khepri therefore embodies: the concept of metamorphosis and emerging into life; the sun

<sup>102</sup> Colla, p. 70.

<sup>103</sup> John Gardner Wilkinson, *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (London: John Murray, 1837).

<sup>104</sup> Ward and Griffith, pp. 5-6; Adam Dodd, *Beetle* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2016), p. 48.

emerging from the darkness of the underworld each morning; and, by extension, pious believers emerging from death into an afterlife. In anglophone terminology, 'chafer' denotes a beetle, for example in rose chafer and cockchafer. Ward notes the German word for beetle is 'Käfer', although he does not establish if 'chafer' or 'Käfer' derive from the same root as 'cheper'.

*The Book of the Dead* translated by Budge is also known as *The Book of Coming Forth by Day*, and Khepri has a central role within it as self-creator, as creator of the gods, and as the rising sun.<sup>105</sup> Khepri travels through the underworld on a barque, carrying the sun at night or at the advent of a new moon.<sup>106</sup> A key passage from 'The Chapter of not Letting the Body Perish' emphasises the scarab god's immutability and his immortality.

I am the god Khepera, and my members shall have being everlastingly. I shall not decay, I shall not rot, I shall not putrefy, I shall not turn into worms, and I shall not see corruption before the eye of the god Shu. I shall have my being, I shall have my being; I shall live, I shall live; I shall flourish, I shall flourish, I shall flourish, I shall wake up in peace, I shall not putrefy, my intestines shall not perish, I shall not suffer injury. My eye shall not decay. The form of my face shall not disappear. My ear shall not become deaf. My head shall not be separated from my neck. My tongue shall not be removed. My hair shall not be cut off. My eyebrows shall not be shaved away, and no evil defect shall assail me. My body shall be stablished. It shall neither become a ruin, nor be destroyed on this earth.<sup>107</sup>

Khepri or Khepera does not die, and the beetle god passes on this gift to his followers, guaranteeing resurrection into a new existence after the suspended animation of mummification. In the ancient Egyptian religion Khepri was a divinity to be invoked and worshipped in his own right and through his close associations with the sun god,

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<sup>105</sup> 'A Hymn of Praise to Ra when he Riseth in the Eastern Part of Heaven', *Book of the Dead*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>106</sup> 'The Praises and Glorifyings of Coming Out from and of Going into the Glorious Khert-Neter, which is in the beautiful Amentet, of Coming Forth By Day', in *Book of the Dead*, pp.10-13; 'A Hymn to Ra [which is to be Sung] on the Day of the Month (The Day of the New Moon) [when] the Boat of Ra Sailleth', in *Book of the Dead*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>107</sup> *Book of the Dead*, p. 30.

Ra, and with Osiris, whose underworld Khepri was able to enter and from which he could return.<sup>108</sup>

The scarab beetle became sacred to Ancient Egyptians and symbolised the promise of resurrection in a not dissimilar way to the cross for Christians. In 1884, Myer anticipates a potential difficulty in nineteenth-century incomprehension of this iconography. 'To the people of our day, the high position enjoyed in the religion of Ancient Egypt by this insect appears very strange, for to us there is nothing attractive about it'.<sup>109</sup> He counters this by observing prejudice ought not to work against an entomological emblem of sacredness, and that Ancient Egyptians might be equally surprised at Christians venerating a Roman instrument of capital punishment. Beetle and cross are alike in transcending their original being as bug and wooden torture device and becoming the embodiment of the promise of an afterlife beyond death.



Figure 0:11

Jan Fabre, *Scarabée Sacré* (2011), Bronze, 38 x 42 x 76 cm. Touring Exhibit

<sup>108</sup> See Zahi A. Hawass, *The Golden King: The World of Tutankhamun* (National Geographic Society, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Myer, p. 2.

Modern-day sculptor, Jan Fabre visually echoes Myer with his piece *Scarabee Sacree* shown in Figure 0:11. Fabre's coprophagous beetle is ten times the size of the natural insect and carries upon its back (or is impaled by) a cross bearing the words 'Scarabee Sacree', which Fabre translates as 'Holy Dung Beetle'. Fused together in metal, the two icons are open to interpretation as neutral commentary, irony, or blasphemy depending on perspective. What the piece reiterates is that to the Ancient Egyptians, the scarab was a sacred resurrection motif, and their belief system is a place where a sympathetic insect is uncontestably located.

Taken cumulatively, the texts of Petrie, Budge, Loftie, Ward and Myer, combined with the ever-expanding collection of museum exhibits, serve as proof the study of scarabs was gaining increasing prominence around the *fin de siècle*. The iconography of Khepri became not just the province of explorers, curators or researchers, it also crept into the imagination of the late-Victorian popular press and novelists. In January 1894, *Cornhill Magazine* carried an eleven-page article on 'Insect Gods', which employs a vocabulary evocative of a Christian sermon in its lengthy discussion of the sacred scarab.

But if any animal was worthy of deification [...] surely it was this pious and industrious beetle, which buried its balls of dung—pure corruption and foulness—in the graves it dug for itself, in the sure and certain hope of a speedy resurrection [...] its proceedings an undoubted argument for the immortality of the soul.<sup>110</sup>

The lower-case beetle is a creature in which cultural entomology, zoology and mythology combine: the fusion of coleoptera and Khepri. What emotions are stirred by Marsh's capitalised Beetle is to be explored in this thesis, and I now in brief consider the emotion of sympathy in preparation for that exercise.

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<sup>110</sup> Anon, 'Insect Gods', *Cornhill Magazine* (January 1894), 45-55 (pp. 48-50).

## The Sympathetic Insect

The *fin-de-siècle* naturalist William H. Hudson occupied a middle ground between entomological objectivity, an almost spiritual respect for insect unknowability, and a sympathetic imagination which tried to penetrate their psychology. He makes no claim to scientific prowess in *Nature in Downland* (1900), nor does he use Latinate names, preferring to think of insects as ‘fairy fauna’.<sup>111</sup> Such terminology may sound twee to the modern ear. His sympathetic admiration for insects, and early deconstruction of human privileged status, does not:

we do not and never can know what an insect knows or feel what it feels. What appearance this visible world has to an eye with twenty thousand facets to it is beyond our power to imagine or conceive. Nay, more, we know that these small bodies have windows and avenues which ours are without; that they are conscious of vibrations which for us do not exist; that millions of “nimble emanations” that miss us in spite of our large size, hit them. We can gaze through a magnifying glass at certain of their complex organs of sense, but cannot conjecture their use. They are as great a mystery or as meaningless to us as our most delicate and complicated scientific instruments would seem to a wild man of the woods.<sup>112</sup>

Kirby and Spence, Darwin, Lubbock, Domestica, Wood, Hudson et al. indicate the entomological and naturalist environment in which *The Beetle* was written, and I have outlined how this ran in parallel with the scarab’s mythological associations spelled out by the Egyptologists. Before commencing the search for the sympathetic insect in relation to Marsh, a preparatory examination of how the emotion of sympathy was, and is, conceived of will help clarify how I have arrived at my own definition of “sympathetic”. While in-depth elaboration of eighteenth and nineteenth-century debates on sympathy is impractical if I am not to diverge too far

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<sup>111</sup> William H. Hudson, *Nature in Downland* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1900), p. 59.

<sup>112</sup> Hudson, p. 70.

from my thesis' aim, I select a few salient points and supplement them with the thoughts of modern theoreticians.<sup>113</sup>

"Sympathetic" (feeling for another from a separate perspective), I cautiously delineate from "empathetic" (feeling with, experiencing what another feels), mindful of Brigid Lowe's caution: 'to follow this usage uncritically seems to me to represent a fatal misinterpretation of the Victorian sense of the word'.<sup>114</sup> My separation of the two emotions is only in part because the second term is anachronistic with reference to a late-Victorian novel, it is mainly down to the fact that if "sympathetic" is hard to conceive of in conjunction with an insect, "empathetic" is well-nigh impossible.<sup>115</sup>

The OED notes from the late seventeenth century, the meaning of "sympathy" and its adjectival form was largely accepted as:

[t]he quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling.<sup>116</sup>

It is in this way Milton uses it in *Paradise Lost*, the well-thumbed work carried by Darwin aboard the *Beagle*. It is how I understand Darwin himself to use it, particularly in *The Descent of Man*. It is how I use it in this thesis.<sup>117</sup>

One formative influence on nineteenth-century sympathy was Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) in which Smith settles on a definition of sympathy as 'fellow feeling', especially in the sense of a 'correspondence of

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<sup>113</sup> Regrettably space does not allow for coverage of David Hume's theories on the sympathetic imagination.

<sup>114</sup> Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy* (London: Anthem Press, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>115</sup> The German concept of *Einfühlung* had been gaining traction since the 1870s particularly in relation to aesthetics, but Edward Bradford Titchener's English translation of it as 'empathy' only appeared in 1909; Rae Greiner, '1909: The Introduction of the Word "Empathy" into English', <[https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=rae-greiner-1909-the-introduction-of-the-word-empathy-into-english](https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=rae-greiner-1909-the-introduction-of-the-word-empathy-into-english)> [accessed 04 July 2021].

<sup>116</sup> O.E.D. online; 'Sympathy'; Eric Schleisser, ed., *Sympathy: A History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015).

<sup>117</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, [1871] (London: John Murray, 1896). Page references are taken from this second edition.

sentiments'.<sup>118</sup> Fellow feelings occur between a spectator and a potential sympathy recipient, and emotions either glad or sad ones, need not be experienced to an equal extent by both parties.

Sympathy, therefore does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality.<sup>119</sup>

Rae Greiner uses this as an argument for locating sympathy for fictional characters 'by feeling for them "from the imagination" what they "from reality", cannot'.<sup>120</sup> Although she presents her theory in relation to nineteenth-century realist novels, it can equally apply to texts from other genres. In an encounter between a reader and a fictional text or between characters within the text, all that is required for sympathy is the presence of fellow feelings. Smith argues of fellow feelings '[t]hough they will never be unisons, they may be concords'.<sup>121</sup> Imbalance or lack of reciprocity does not preclude the emotion of sympathy. On that basis it might be experienced for an insect.

Smith's discussion on 'fellow feeling with the sentiments of the other' shows the emotion to be much restricted by selfishness or egoism.<sup>122</sup>

Men, though naturally sympathetic, feel so little for another with whom they have no particular connection in comparison of what they feel for themselves; the misery of one, who is merely their fellow-creature, is of so little importance to them in comparison to even a small conveniency of their own.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Alexander Millar, 1759), p. 12.

<sup>119</sup> Smith, *Sentiments*, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> D. Rae Greiner, 'Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel', *Victorian Studies*, 53.3 (Spring 2011), 417-26 (p. 420).

<sup>121</sup> Smith, *Sentiments*, p. 17.

<sup>122</sup> Smith, *Sentiments*, p. 33.

<sup>123</sup> Smith, *Sentiments*, p. 78.

It follows from this, the less an observer or reader regards themselves as linked to a sufferer, the less a sufferer's predicament affects them. This establishes a correlation between sameness and sympathy so that 'extreme sympathy with misfortunes which we know nothing about, seems altogether absurd and unreasonable'.<sup>124</sup> Eric Schliesser refers to this phenomenon in *Sympathy: A History* as 'the likeness principle'.<sup>125</sup>

There is an element of condescension about Smith's sympathy. It comes from a place of comfortable if not complacent superiority in which the observing sympathiser is at home in the dominant culture, perhaps by virtue of gender, class, religion, nation, and species, and who judges the worthiness of the potential recipient of his sympathy according to his own laws. Suzanne Keen describes this as 'bounded strategic empathy', operating from within an 'in-group', and I adapt her concept to bounded strategic sympathy.<sup>126</sup> The corollary is sympathy may be withheld on one occasion, but an expanded or altered perspective might make it possible to feel the emotion at another time. External appearances are powerful determinants on whether potential sympathy recipients are likely or unlikely to have the emotion bestowed on them. Audrey Jaffe maintains in *Scenes of Sympathy* that Adam Smith's views exerted an influence throughout the nineteenth century, and she highlights the visual element of sympathy emanating from a power position often financial, or as I argue of a *fin-de-siècle* novel, a power position often imperial.<sup>127</sup>

Victorian representations of sympathy are, as sympathy was for Smith, specular, involving social relations that make subjects assess others visually and transform them into objects with a representational dimension.<sup>128</sup> Specular and

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<sup>124</sup> Smith, *Sentiments*, p. 122.

<sup>125</sup> Schliesser, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> Suzanne Keen, 'A Theory of Narrative Empathy', *Narrative*, 14.3 (October 2006), 207-36 (pp. 214-5, 224); Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007); Suzanne Keen, 'Narrative and the Emotions', *Poetics Today*, 32.1 (Spring 2011), 1-5.

<sup>127</sup> Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000).

<sup>128</sup> Jaffe, p. 8.



indeed spectacular considerations inform my reading of *The Beetle* in terms of how a situation appears, how the supernatural insect looks, and how perception is coloured by cultural bias. Jaffe observes '[t]he figures Victorian society defined as objects of sympathy were, of course, its outcasts, situated outside respectable identity'.<sup>129</sup> She is talking about texts featuring, among other pitiable figures, abandoned women, non-Christians and the impoverished. The central character in *The Beetle* is abandoned and nevertheless denied sympathy. This thesis examines what part insect imagery plays in that refusal of fellow feeling.

Susan Lanzoni in 'Sympathy in *Mind*' identifies Smith's moral sympathy as the cornerstone of evolutionary ethics as well as aesthetic appreciation.<sup>130</sup> Both come into play when approaching the Beetle who is primarily positioned as ugly, malevolent, and atavistic. Rob Boddice in *The Science of Sympathy* interprets Darwin's *Descent of Man* as a blueprint for sympathy based on evolutionary principles and superseding the 'moral universe' of Adam Smith.<sup>131</sup> Smith's apparently contradictory stance in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* compared to *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) was referred to by the German economist August Oncken as '*Das Adam Smith Problem*'. Thomas Dixon in *The Invention of Altruism* identifies a comparable tension between *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*, which he dubs 'The Charles Darwin Problem'.<sup>132</sup> Dixon wryly notes: 'the theory of the evolution of moral sense that Darwin developed in *The Descent of Man* (1871) was complicated and — to modern readers familiar with neo-Darwinism — not entirely Darwinian.'<sup>133</sup>

Darwin theorised sympathy and co-operation are indispensable to self-preservation because the good of the community and the good of the individual are

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<sup>129</sup> Jaffe, p. 18.

<sup>130</sup> Susan Lanzoni, 'Sympathy in *Mind* (1876-1900)', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70.2 (2009), 265-87 (p. 266).

<sup>131</sup> Rob Boddice, *The Science of Sympathy: Morality, Evolution, and Victorian Civilization* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), p. 7.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), p. 138.

<sup>133</sup> Dixon, p. 7.

inextricably interlinked, so survival need not be all about ruthless competition. In *Descent of Man*, he envisages social instincts extending beyond the self, family, or tribal community to embrace all people and all sentient beings, thereby creating a virtuous circle in which, admittedly in anthropocentric terms, society reaches increasingly higher levels of civilisation and success.

As [man] regarded more and more, not only the welfare, but the happiness of his fellow-men; as from habit, following on beneficial experience, instruction and example, his sympathies became more tender and widely diffused, extending to men of all races [...] and finally to the lower animals,—so would the standard of his morality rise higher and higher.<sup>134</sup>

There are mental, emotional, affective and practical elements to sympathy. To experience the emotion is to act in a moral fashion visible to others, which receives their approbation and is imitated by them, and this behaviour best fits the superorganism of the human and animal world for survival. It moves us towards global and ecological awareness. Darwin does not advocate altruism. He never uses the word in *The Descent of Man* where he theorises sympathetic acts ultimately arise from self-interest and not from a disinterested concern for others. It is a proposition to which I shall return in relation to Marsh's central character.

In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin goes so far as to comment how 'ants and certain lamellicorn beetles [into which category scarabs fall] are capable of feeling an attachment for each other'.<sup>135</sup> In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), he notes 'we readily perceive sympathy in others by their expression', and may offer it in return on that basis, and he precedes this statement with the caveat it would be erroneous to attribute emotionlessness to insects due to expressionless faces or non-vocalisation.<sup>136</sup> Communications may be through hissing, stridulation,

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<sup>134</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, pp. 124-25.

<sup>135</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 317.

<sup>136</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872), pp. 365-66.

releasing pheromones or playing dead.<sup>137</sup> ‘Even insects express anger, terror, jealousy and love’.<sup>138</sup> Gillian Beer notes in *Darwin’s Plots* how Darwin’s early notebooks of the late 1830s prefigure his mature arguments on the ‘mental and emotional capacities of the whole range of organic beings’, and demonstrate an admiration for insects long before his more well-known works were published.<sup>139</sup> ‘People often talk of the wonderful event of intellectual man appearing—the appearance of insects with other senses is more wonderful.’<sup>140</sup> That insects are sentient, may experience emotion despite having expressionless faces, and in a morally mature society are worthy of sympathy, are ideas fundamental to Darwin. They colour this thesis’ analysis of *The Beetle*.

Michel Foucault begins *The Order of Things* with a contemplation of perspective prompted by Diego Velázquez’ painting ‘Las Meninas’ (1656). Sophie Ratcliffe opens *On Sympathy* with an interpretation of the ‘*profil perdu*’ of John William Waterhouse’s *Miranda—The Tempest* (1916), in which Ratcliffe reads the young woman’s partially averted face as a metaphor for the physiognomical and textual ‘difficulty of finding an appropriate expression for sympathy.’<sup>141</sup> Both examples highlight how sympathy is a slippery concept dependent on point of view. It involves a moral judgement ideally exercised by an impartial observer, however, building on Smith, Schliesser, Keen and Jaffe, it becomes clearer there may be no such person.

Observational viewpoints and emotional reactions to a fictional insect are influenced by its extra-textual ecosystem and by the vocabulary, plot, narratorial perspectives, and even cover design of the book in which it appears, all of which

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<sup>137</sup> See Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 303.

<sup>138</sup> Darwin, *Expression of the Emotions*, p. 350.

<sup>139</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 244.

<sup>140</sup> Beer cites Darwin’s notebook (B 207-8). In *Descent of Man* Darwin states beetles are less intelligent than ants, p. 54.

<sup>141</sup> Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), p. 1.

combine to steer a reader's judgement in a particular direction. In this context, Ratcliffe's comment is apposite:

if sympathy is seen as an aspect of human intelligence, derived from an emotional experience, which is in turn based on evaluating and appraising objects, one can deduce that it is a state which can be changed, developed, augmented or manipulated.<sup>142</sup>

Howard Sklar picks up on authorial manipulation and textual artifice in *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction*. He argues that sympathy in the real world and sympathy in fiction function in similar ways. A situation in either one might evoke a response leading to sympathetic emotion followed by action and permanent change in 'ethical sensitivity'.<sup>143</sup> This is where a fictitious insect could stimulate entomological protectiveness through sympathetic identification or it could cause harm through the opposite. The key difference between life and literature is that a character or creature existing within the parameters of a text can only ever be a passive recipient of sympathy, and their position and resultant influence, as Suzanne Keen notes in *Narrative Empathy* and as Wayne Booth sets out in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, is almost wholly dependent on how the author presents them.<sup>144</sup> An author writing in the Gothic genre with its 'anxiety model', exploitation of recoil, otherness, alterity and supernaturalism may place a monsterised insect beyond the limit of sympathetic reach.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ratcliffe, p. 14.

<sup>143</sup> Howard Sklar, *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction: Forms of Ethical and Emotional Persuasion (Linguistic Approaches to Literature)* (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>144</sup> Keen, 'Narrative Empathy'; Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

<sup>145</sup> Baldick and Mighall consider the 'anxiety model' of the Gothic to be 'tautologically simplistic'; Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism', in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), pp. 267-87 (pp. 279-80).

## Forthcoming Chapters

Suggested by the compound eye of the insect, each chapter scrutinises *The Beetle* through a different lens to construct an accurate image of its entomological subject. The first chapter contemplates the influence upon *The Beetle* of the author's biography, offers a brief plot synopsis, and interprets the central entity through monster theory and postcolonial theory, siting the novel within the tradition of Imperial Gothic and envisaging the Beetle as an ideological representation of the feminised, Orientalised East. The second chapter moves away from scarab subalternity to situate the novel at the intersection of Beetlemania, Egyptology and Egyptomania, focuses on ancient medicine, positive mythological associations of the sacred insect, and considers comparable examples of Egyptian Gothic. The third chapter then theorises how sex, species, and the attribution of evil in relation to those characteristics and to perceived outer ugliness impacts on sympathetic reaction. The fourth chapter examines the insect's occupation of the urban space, aesthetically, materially and geocritically, and ties it to the western appropriation of Egyptian objects, assessing the degree to which it is possible for a non-native creature to be in alignment with what is, to them, foreign London. The fifth chapter charts the adaptation of *The Beetle* into film and drama, and traces manifestations of the insect in other works where audience or reader emotional identification is weakened or strengthened. The conclusion will determine whether the hypothesis is proven it has been possible to locate a sympathetic insect, and it will extrapolate what the result might mean for universal kinship, insect preservation or apocalyptic eradication.

## Chapter One

### Monstrosity, Subalternity, and the Sympathetic Scarab

Richard Marsh's character, the Beetle, for whom *The Beetle: A Mystery* is named, is an unusually large scarab alternating physiological form with that of a person.<sup>1</sup> The shapeshifter is an Egyptian alien up to no good on English soil, unwelcome and unappealing. This thesis' analysis of the novel and its central character begins with a biographical investigation into the author to see if there are factors in his own background that may hint at a subtly provocative positioning of his entomological nuisance. Others of Marsh's texts provide a counter-check to how he handles similar subject matter elsewhere. This chapter presents the Beetle as both monster and subaltern. It examines how these marginalising characteristics influence the sympathetic reactions to the entity inhabiting a tale in which the dominant discourse is white, Christian, Eurocentric and anthropocentric.

Monstrosity and subalternity delineate what Ritu Birla calls 'identity-in-difference', or alterity of lower status.<sup>2</sup> Human-insect metaphors, as Christopher Hollingsworth notes in 'The Force of the Entomological Other', are 'common features of the language of oppression'.<sup>3</sup> My contention is that in *The Beetle* the powerful agency of scarab monstrosity counterbalances the powerlessness of bug subalternity. In *Postcolonial Studies*, Marcus Green identifies 'subaltern' as a concept originating with Gramsci, used to represent a subordinate position constituted through the politics of inequality: more complex than a mere censor-fooling euphemism for the proletariat. Green comments: 'Gramsci never reduces subordination to a single relation, but rather conceives subalternity as an intersectionality of the variations of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Beetle: A Mystery* [1897] (Kansas: Valancourt Books, 2008). References are taken from this publication.

<sup>2</sup> Ritu Birla, 'Postcolonial Studies', in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. by Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), pp. 87-99.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Hollingsworth, 'The Force of the Entomological Other', in *Insect Poetics*, pp. 262-77 (p. 265).

race, class, gender, culture, religion, nationalism, and colonialism functioning within an ensemble of socio-political and economic relations'.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the critical consensus, I want to propose that the Beetle is coded female, and believe this is designed to amplify the alterity and subalternity of the monster.<sup>5</sup>

Determining what constitutes a monster is an exclusionary process found by Margrit Shildrick to be primarily Eurocentric, anthropocentric and phallocentric. 'That which is different must be located outside the boundaries of the proper, in black people, in foreigners, in animals, in the congenitally disabled and in women; in short in all those who might be seen as monstrous'.<sup>6</sup> My argument is that being non-white, being foreign, manifesting as an insect, and being a woman, are monstrous embodiments which combine to place the Beetle outside bounded strategic sympathy. Racial, cultural, species and sexual considerations act to exclude her from the circle of emotional connection. She is an Egyptian existing in what is on the surface the epitome of a British imperialist narrative, one that renders her monstrous bug and subaltern scarab and stifles her in the telling of her own tale. For her to be found anything other than abhorrent requires imaginative effort on the part of critic and reader. Beneath her constructed exoskeleton may lie softer parts likely to stimulate sympathy or at the very least mitigate antipathy. It is possible the author of *The Beetle*, even if in an act of subconscious subversion of his own metaphor, is helping locate them.

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<sup>4</sup> Marcus E. Green, 'Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks', *Postcolonial Studies*, 14.4 (2011), 387-404 (p. 400).

<sup>5</sup> I draw on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and its development of Julian Benda's conception: 'woman ***is the Other***' [original capitalisation, italics and bold], p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 4-5.

## The Novelist and his Text

Richard Marsh, the author of *The Beetle*, was a shady character, a convicted fraudster practically disinherited by his disapproving mother, whose will of 1888 left her eldest son the meagre sum of twenty-five pounds out of an Estate approaching three thousand pounds, and whose bequest was accompanied by what Minna Vuohelainen describes as ‘a litany of religious admonitions’.<sup>7</sup> In comparison with his contemporary writers, Richard Marsh still remains shadowy. In her contribution to *Victorian Authors Beyond the Canon*, Ailise Bulfin calls him ‘evasive’.<sup>8</sup> Certainly the text of his personal and professional life is riddled with ellipses. Only one photograph of him survives.<sup>9</sup> It illustrates a posthumous interview in the *Strand Magazine* of November 1915, and the man pictured there is older and doubtless portlier than the thirty-nine-year-old who wrote *The Beetle*.<sup>10</sup>



Figure I:1

Richard Marsh, *Strand Magazine* (November 1915)

What little is discoverable about Marsh must be gleaned from this interview and a scattering of sources including newspaper reports, letters, prison records, family anecdotes, and archive papers at the University of Reading and those formerly

<sup>7</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, ‘Introduction’, in *The Beetle*, pp. vii-xxx (p. x).

<sup>8</sup> Ailise Bulfin, ‘Richard Marsh and the Realist Gothic: Pursuing Traces of an Evasive Author in his Fin-de-Siècle Popular Fiction’, in *Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon*, ed. by Daragh Downes and Trish Ferguson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 201-18.

<sup>9</sup> Two photographs of Richard Marsh held in the Special Collections of the University of Reading were noted as missing on 27 March 2006: RUL MS 2501/58 [missing].

<sup>10</sup> Richard Marsh, ‘How I “Broke into Print”’, *Strand Magazine*, 50 (November 1915), 573-574.



in the possession of his grandson, Robert Aickman, held at the British Library. Aickman comments in his autobiography how his father, Marsh's son-in-law:

rather looked down on my Grandfather, as being, among other things, fast, foreign, and flashy (the alliteration was not, and never could have been his), while also envying him for, among other things, his insouciance, determination, and popular magnetism.<sup>11</sup>

The not quite straightforward Englishness of Richard Marsh is significant in relation to *The Beetle*, and my contention is that there existed a degree of symbiosis between the author and his most successful text which lasted until his death. To comprehend the bug in the book, it is necessary also to comprehend the man who wrote it.

Richard Marsh was born Richard Bernard Heldmann on 12 October 1857 in London.<sup>12</sup> He was a year older than his brother Henry, and three years older than his sister Alice Sophia. His mother, née Emma Marsh was the daughter of a lace merchant. His father, Joseph Heldmann, was, according to Aickman, a German immigrant of Jewish extraction whose family had fled from Bavaria in 1848 and settled in Nottingham.<sup>13</sup> When Richard Bernard was still a baby, the Heldmann name was swathed in controversy due to Joseph's alleged swindling of his wife's relatives and a bankruptcy case so infamous it was reported in *The Times* where he was branded an 'adventurer', a 'reckless man' and a liar.<sup>14</sup> Joseph then abandoned his career as a lace and crape manufacturer and began running a respectable school in Hammersmith, attended by, amongst others, Edith Nesbit and her brother.<sup>15</sup> The father put dubious

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue* [1966] (Leyburn: Tartarus Press, 2013), p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, *Victorian Research Fiction Guide 35, Richard Marsh* (Canterbury Christ Church University, UK 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Aickman, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *The Times* (16 July 1858), p.11; Emelyne Godfrey, *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence, in Victorian Literature and Society: From Dagger-Fans to Suffragettes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 133.

<sup>15</sup> William Baker, 'Introduction', in *The Beetle* by Richard Marsh (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd in association with the University of Luton, 1994), pp. vii-x (p. viii). Edith Nesbit dedicated her children's Egyptian tale to Dr Wallis Budge. Edith Nesbit, *The Story of the Amulet* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906).

business practices behind him, however his eldest son would pick them up and operate as a con man for some months during his twenties.

Prior to this, Richard had enjoyed a moderately successful writing career when, under his middle name 'Bernard' and actual surname 'Heldmann', he contributed boys' school and adventure stories to *Union Jack*, a quality weekly. The editor, G. A. Henty promoted him to co-editor in 1882, and all seemed to be progressing well until their journalistic collaboration ended abruptly a year later when Heldmann's story, *A Couple of Scamps*, was dropped as unsuitable for publication. Whether the impetus for the fraudulent phase of his life was financial hardship following the loss of income from the *Union Jack* and enforced closure of his bank account, or whether it was driven by greed coupled with a reckless disregard for the law remains a matter for speculation.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the driving force, Richard Bernard Heldmann was issuing forged cheques at various locations throughout England and France during a good deal of 1883 when he was adopting multiple aliases including Captain George Roberts of the Indian Army, Doctor Green and Captain Martyn, and using a combination of charm and ostensible respectability to gain credit under false pretences.<sup>17</sup> He was pursued by the Llandudno Police and Tunbridge Wells Authorities and finally apprehended in February 1884 as he stepped off a train, ironically the mode of transport on which the Beetle tries to make her escape.<sup>18</sup> Heldmann was sentenced to eighteen months' hard labour at The Maidstone Quarter Sessions on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1884.<sup>19</sup> According to the description given of him in The Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll, he was twenty-six, a well-educated man, five foot five inches tall with brown hair.<sup>20</sup> He seems to have served his period of incarceration

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<sup>16</sup> ' "Captain Roberts" Sent for Trial', *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 20 February 1884, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> C. James, 'Callum James's literary detective agency, case #1: why was Richard Marsh?' (30 November 2009), <<http://callumjames.blogspot.de/2009/11/callum-jamess-literary-detective-agency>> [accessed 03 January 2015].

<sup>18</sup> Shaun Cooper 'Foreword' in *The Goddess: A Demon* (Bakewell: Country Books, 2017), pp. 1-4.

<sup>19</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, 'Introduction', in *The Complete Judith Lee Adventures, by Richard Marsh*, ed. by M. Vuohelainen (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2016), pp. vii-xxv.

<sup>20</sup> Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll, November 1883-November 1884, no. 2100: "Hildmann, Bernard" cited in Vuohelainen, 'Introduction', in *Richard Marsh* p. 8.

without incident, and I theorise along with Richard Dalby, it acted as a chrysalis stage in his development as an author and heavily influenced his subsequent writing.<sup>21</sup>

After his release, Richard Marsh emerged calling himself by his own first name and his mother's maiden name, possibly a tactic to avoid anti-German or anti-Semitic prejudice. By the 1880s there was a large population of immigrant Jews in the East End of London, provoking resentment and debate on the 'Alien Question'.<sup>22</sup> To have it spelled out that he was of Jewish heritage at this point could have been disadvantageous to his career, and the name change had the added benefit of concealing his identity as a notorious fraudster and son of an embezzler.<sup>23</sup> His adopted name was identical to that of his maternal grandfather as well as to the well-known racehorse trainer to royalty.<sup>24</sup> The coincidence may well have amused the writer who was never what could be called a society man. He was more of a middlebrow hack using a solid English pseudonym that functioned as much more than a *nom-de-plume*. It distanced him from his ethnic origins and his criminal past. It also facilitated a separation from his literary past of boys' stories. Writing produced after his stint in jail was aimed at the adult mass market and comprised works of the supernatural, the criminal, romance, and war stories. In this way the person of the journalist and writer formerly known as Bernard Heldmann was overwritten by the novelist Richard Marsh. The metamorphosis was complete.

*The Beetle* featured on *The Bookman's* bestseller list for half a year and was so popular it was even said to have outsold Bram Stoker's *Dracula* also published in 1897, although at that time neither author was achieving anything approaching the sales of

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Dalby, 'Richard Marsh: Novelist Extraordinaire', *Book and Magazine Collector*, 163.10 (1997), 76-89.

<sup>22</sup> The Alien Act was passed by Parliament in 1905.

<sup>23</sup> David Feldman, 'The Importance of Being English: Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England', in *Metropolis: London Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. by David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp.56-84.

<sup>24</sup> The horseman was entrenched in the establishment and went on to be awarded a knighthood for distinguished personal service to the royal family. All other references to Richard Marsh indicate the author.

Marie Corelli.<sup>25</sup> William Baker in his 1994 introduction to *The Beetle* comments that by 1913 *The Beetle* was in its fifteenth print whereas *Dracula* was only in its tenth, and he interprets this as indicative of greater sales right up to the First World War.<sup>26</sup> Allegations Marsh aped Stoker or was at loggerheads with him are unfounded because his serialised version of *The Beetle* preceded *Dracula* even though the novel was published after it.<sup>27</sup> Some contemporary critics rated the insect horror higher than the vampire horror, and advertisements for *The Beetle* were eager to point this out quoting *The Glasgow Herald* and *The Academy*: 'Mr. Bram Stoker's effort of the imagination was not easy to beat, but Mr. Marsh has, so to speak, out-Heroded Herod'; 'Dracula, by Mr. Bram Stoker, was creepy, but Mr. Marsh goes one, oh! many more than one better'.<sup>28</sup>

To understand the magnitude of Marsh's achievement with *The Beetle* and place it in a quantifiable context, in 1895 there were 1,315 new novels published, and by 1897 the number was likely to have risen even higher, yet amongst all these publications Marsh's insect horror still made an enormous impact.<sup>29</sup> There can be no doubt about the prominence of the Beetle since the Gothic tale is explicitly named after it. The serialised version ran in *Answers* throughout the Spring of 1897 under the title, 'The Peril of Paul Lessingham: The Story of a Haunted Man'.<sup>30</sup> When Skeffington & Sons published the one-volume novel later in the year, the coleopteran was

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<sup>25</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, 'From "Vulgar" and "Impossible" to "Pre-Eminently Readable": Richard Marsh's Critical Fortunes, 1893-1915', *English Studies*, 95.3 (2014), 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> Baker, p. vii. My own 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Skeffington's *The Beetle* is dated 1897 so Baker may exaggerate.

<sup>27</sup> In 1902 Marsh drops a note to Stoker in 1902 requesting theatre tickets, which suggests they were on civil terms. See Richard Marsh, Letter to Bram Stoker dated 09 June 1902 (Leeds: Brotherton Library, Special Collections, BC MS 19c Stoker).

<sup>28</sup> 'Opinions of the Press on Mr. Richard Marsh's Novel *The Beetle: A Mystery*', in *The Beetle: A Mystery* by Richard Marsh, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn] (London: Skeffington, 1897).

<sup>29</sup> This figure is given in Nick Freeman, 'Tall Tales and True: Richard Marsh and Late Victorian Journalism', in *Richard Marsh, Popular fiction and Literary Culture, 1890-1915: Rereading the fin de siècle*, ed. by Victoria Margree, Daniel Orrells and Minna Vuohelainen (Manchester UP, 2018), pp. 27-44 (p. 31).

<sup>30</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, 'Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897): A late-Victorian popular novel', *Working With English: Medieval and Modern Language, Literature and Drama: Literary Fads and Fashions*, 2.1 (2006), 89-100.

promoted above the human. The first edition shown in Figure 1:2 spells out *The Beetle* in stamped gilt lettering. Beneath it is a larger-than-life insect against a blood red background. In style it is an ironic nod to entomological guides, however this is a work concerned with the Egyptianised supernatural not with the natural. The book's spine features two eyes of Horus, recognisable iconographic motifs from Egyptology, and these paratextual devices highlight the provenance of the all-seeing insect.<sup>31</sup> In cover illustration, in catchy title, in the struggle for survival in the crowded literary marketplace, the Egyptian scarab dominates.

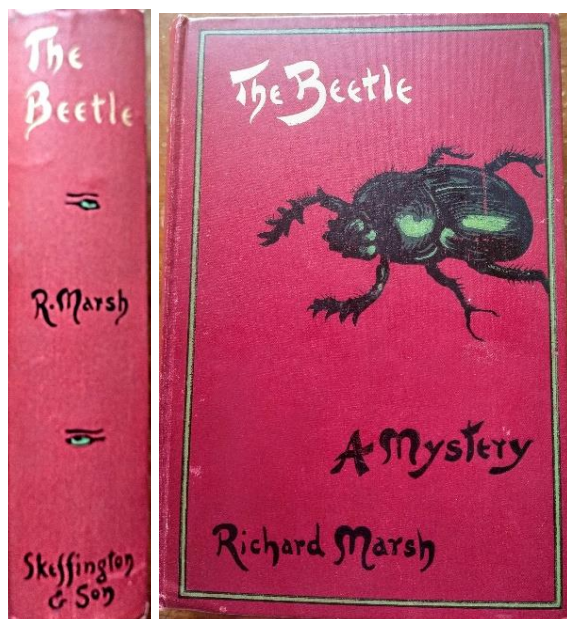


Figure 1:2

Richard Marsh, *The Beetle: A Mystery*  
(London: Skeffington and Son, 1897)

Personal Copy

*The Beetle* firmly cemented Marsh's position as a writer of popular fiction and was used to endorse future texts as having been written by the same man. Vuohelainen marks its publication a 'watershed' in his career.<sup>32</sup> Marsh appears to have had a fondness for his own creation, as evidenced by his keeping safe a eulogistic fan letter concerning *The Beetle*, perhaps unintentionally referencing entomophagy,

<sup>31</sup> Valancourt's scholarly edition of *The Beetle* reproduces the original front cover, but not the spine.

<sup>32</sup> Vuohelainen, 'From "Vulgar" and "Impossible" '.

and inviting the writer to consign the correspondence to the wastepaper basket if unwelcome.

I have read a great deal of fiction but it was not until I had devoured your "Beetle" that I got an idea what a Novel could or should be. I am left marvelling as to what sort of wonderful inherent talent it must be to produce such a work, at once so Engrossing, so educating & so Enjoyable. [...] I have not written this eulogistically in order to curry favor: rather than you should think that I would beg you to consign this letter to the Wastepaper basket [capitalisation original].<sup>33</sup>

Marsh did not throw the letter away. On the contrary, he kept it. Even with the dozens of subsequent novels in a range of genres he produced in its wake, the author owed a longstanding debt to *The Beetle*. Marsh may have sold the rights to his bestseller 'outright to keep his family for a week or so', as his grandson recounts, but it paid dividends in other ways, not least in consolidating his reputation.<sup>34</sup>

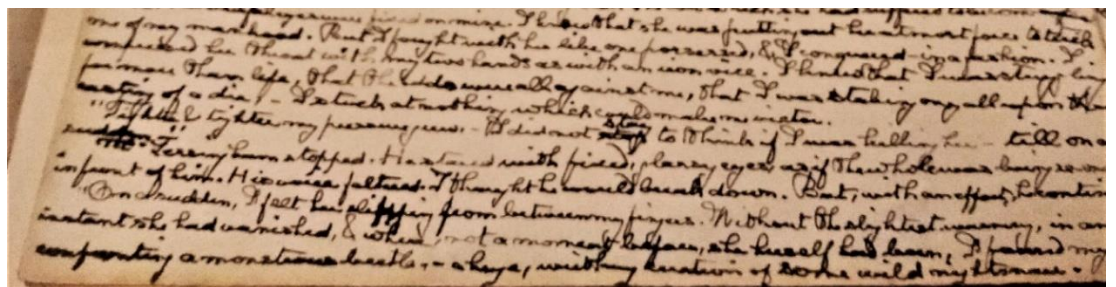
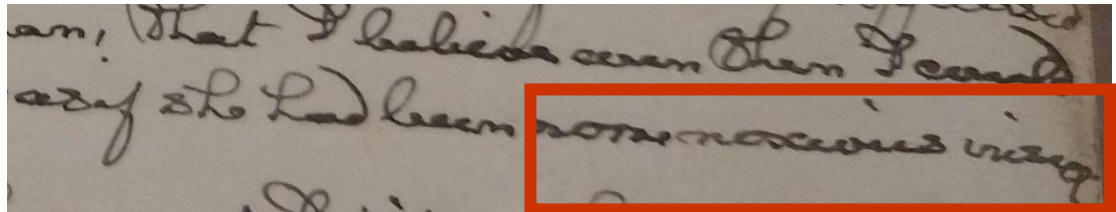


Figure I:3

Partial Manuscript of *The Beetle*: Richard Marsh's Handwriting, pp.107, 109.

London: British Library

<sup>33</sup> Chas J. Webb to Richard Marsh, letter dated 11 June 1913 (London: British Library, Western Manuscripts Unbound, Add. MS. 89209/6/21).

<sup>34</sup> Aickman, p. 8.

Aickman recalls of Marsh: 'His handwriting was as small as Charlotte Bronte's and most of his works were written in it'.<sup>35</sup> 'He was much away from home. When there, he poured forth words in his tiny handwriting at the highest pressure'.<sup>36</sup> The sample of Marsh's handwriting shown in Figure 1:3 is taken from the partially intact manuscript of *The Beetle* at the British Library.<sup>37</sup> Support is lent to Aickman's impression of Marsh's frenetic output by the fact three other novels by him came out the same year as *The Beetle*. These were: *The Duke and the Damsel* published by C. A. Pearson; *The Mystery of Philip Bennion's Death*; and *The Crime and the Criminal*, both published by Ward Lock & Co. who numbered among their other authors, H. Rider Haggard, Guy Boothby, Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde. *The Mystery of Philip Bennion's Death* had in fact first come out in serial form in *Household Words* in 1892 so the novel's publication date is no indicator of the date of its composition. What is undeniable, is that in 1897 Marsh was working with three different publishers on three different novels in a very short space of time.

While *The Academy* considered *The Duke and the Damsel* 'vulgar' and 'impossible', the sensational split narrative of *The Crime and the Criminal* was well received by the *Athenaeum* as 'an uncommonly able story of the dreadful type'.<sup>38</sup> *The Crime and the Criminal* is told in the first person by three narrators. Respectively they are: Tennant, the man accused of a murder he thinks he accidentally committed; Townsend, the member of a murder club who strangles his young mistress of whom he has tired; and Nelly, the purported victim who inadvertently falls from a train compartment. It is she who lands close to where Townsend is disposing of the corpse, and this enables her to identify him as the killer. The final and fourth book shifts to the third person and is explicitly identified as being told by 'The Author', who in this

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<sup>35</sup> Aickman, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Aickman, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Marsh manuscript, pp. 106-39 (London, British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection Unbound, Add. Ms. 89209/6/21, 5086 K).

<sup>38</sup> 'Reviews', *Academy Fiction Supplement*, 52, 27 (November 1897), 115; 'New Novels', *Athenaeum*, 3,650 (9 October 1897), 486-87 (p. 487).

instance appears omniscient and objective. The structure of *The Crime and the Criminal* is very similar to *The Beetle*. They are written at the same time in the same way and Marsh was writing a great deal.

In total, and excluding *The Mystery of Philip Bennion's Death*, the 1897 novels amount to almost a third of a million words with *The Beetle* being the longest. In 1898 Marsh published another three novels and in 1900 at his peak production rate, he had eight volumes out with seven different publishers including *The Goddess: A Demon*.<sup>39</sup> Cumulatively this represents more than half a million words per annum written at a not dissimilar pace to that of Anthony Trollope.<sup>40</sup> Far from indicating a slapdash hack writer, this level of output supports Vuohelainen's view that Marsh like Trollope was a highly disciplined and professional author. Marsh felt compelled to defend himself in a letter of 1897 to the *Academy* in which he uses medical phraseology to explain his writing process: 'As a matter of fact, I produce slowly. Kneading a story, mentally, is a delight, setting it forth on paper is about as bad as a surgical operation.'<sup>41</sup>

Trollope left behind him an autobiography setting out his working methods.<sup>42</sup> There is little information on those of Marsh. Marsh's contemporary and fellow monster maker, Bram Stoker, was a meticulous researcher as can be inferred from the detailed markings, annotations and marginalia in the original books held at The London Library, which bear close correlation to his data-gathering and notes for *Dracula*.<sup>43</sup> Stoker joined the London Library in 1897, having been proposed for

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Goddess: A Demon* (London: F. V. White & Co, 1900).

<sup>40</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, 'The Popular Fiction of Richard Marsh: Literary Production, Genre, Audience' (Doctoral Thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2007).  
<ethos.bl.uk/ProcessOrderDetailsDirect.do?documentId=1&thesisTitle=The+popular+fiction+of+Richard+Marsh+%3A+literary+production%2C+genre%2C+audience&eprintId=499054> [accessed 11 August 2019], p.265.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Marsh, 'Mr Marsh Explains', *Academy* (October 1897), 358.

<sup>42</sup> For Marsh's view on authorship, see Victoria Margree, 'Metanarratives of Authorship in Fin-de-Siècle Popular Fiction: "Is That All You Do, Write Stories?"', *English Literature in Transition*, 59.3 (2016), 1-28.

<sup>43</sup> Phillip Spedding, 'The Books that made *Dracula*', *London Library*,  
<<http://www.londonlibrary.co.uk/dracula>> [accessed 25 June 2021]. Stoker's notebooks were auctioned off by his widow, Florence in 1913.



membership by Hall Caine, the man to whom he dedicated *Dracula*. Marsh was not in the same social sphere and lack of funds may also have played a part in his not becoming a member. Stoker was not exclusively reliant on libraries. He owned many publications including Wallis Budge's *Easy Lessons in Egyptian Hieroglyphics* and *Egyptian Religion*, and Flinders Petrie's *Egyptian Tales Translated from the Papyri*, doubtless indispensable source material for his 1903 Egyptian Gothic, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* addressed in my second chapter.<sup>44</sup>

Nothing is known of Marsh's personal collection of books, and his approach to writing novels is much less obvious than that of Stoker, apart from the fact he produced them at a phenomenal rate. With such a relentless output it is unlikely he would or could devote years of research to each one, which is why this thesis makes no implausible claims for his entomological or Egyptological expertise in respect of *The Beetle*. There is, however, evidence he strove for veracity in his works of fiction by reading related articles and following them up with experts. One example is the correspondence entered into with J. Sisley Haycock of The Association for The Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, during which Haycock thanks Marsh for his 'generously worded appreciation' of an article on lip-reading which appeared in the *Strand Magazine* and asks Marsh to 'please convey my respects to Judith Lee'.<sup>45</sup> This exchange of letters took place nine years before Judith Lee, Marsh's lady detective and 'teacher of the deaf and dumb by the oral system', was introduced to the readership of the *Strand* by its editor.<sup>46</sup> It is plausible Marsh was similarly absorbing information on a range of relevant topics in the run-up to the publication of *The Beetle*.

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<sup>44</sup> Lot 184 in Stoker's auction catalogue was F. L. Norden's *Travels in Egypt and Nubia* (London, 1757); Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (London: Heinemann, 1903).

<sup>45</sup> J. Sisley Haycock to Richard Marsh, letter dated 2 January 1902 (London: British Library, Western Manuscripts Unbound, Add MS. 89209/6/18).

<sup>46</sup> This is how Judith Lee was introduced by the editor of Richard Marsh, 'Conscience', *Strand Magazine*, 42.8 (1911), 215.

The plot of *The Beetle* revolves around a priestess of Isis capable of transforming herself into a large scarab. The novel is divided into four books, each told by a different first-person narrator in a form evidently borrowed from the sensation fiction of Wilkie Collins and also adopted by Marsh in *The Crime and the Criminal*. Suzanne Keen warns in *Narrative Empathy* that ‘within the category of first person narratives, empathy [or sympathy] may be enhanced or impeded by narrative consonance or dissonance, unreliability, discordance, an excess of narrative levels with multiple narrators, extremes of disorder, or an especially convoluted plot’.<sup>47</sup> This describes the structure of *The Beetle*.

The novel opens with the account of Robert Holt, an unemployed clerk in a desperate state who unwittingly enters the Beetle’s lair and is used by her as agent and automaton. It is followed by the account of Sydney Atherton, a gentleman scientist with biological and chemical expertise developing a weapon of mass destruction and uniquely capable of withstanding the Beetle’s mesmeric abilities. For the bulk of the novel Atherton and the Beetle share a common enemy in Paul Lessingham — ‘Those who hate are kin’ — and theirs is an alliance fuelled by Atherton believing himself in love with Lessingham’s fiancée, Marjorie Lindon.<sup>48</sup> She is a young and beautiful New Woman who tells the story up to her abduction by the vindictive Beetle. Finally, the aristocratic detective Augustus Champnell describes his attempt to solve the mystery of the Beetle through the application of logic and tells how Marjorie comes to be rescued from the Beetle’s vengeful machinations. Champnell’s narrative contains Lessingham’s confession of historic transgressions in Cairo against the Egyptian girl who becomes, in Lessingham’s words, the ‘noxious insect’.<sup>49</sup> This framing device has the effect of denying Lessingham a direct relationship with the reader. He is a politician with a carefully constructed persona, a master wordsmith and manipulator of public opinion, who may also be manipulating Champnell because

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<sup>47</sup> Keen, ‘Narrative Empathy’, 215.

<sup>48</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 211.

he needs his help. The Beetle almost succeeds in her fiendish plot until the train on which she is escaping with mesmerised Marjorie crashes. The novel concludes with the monstrous insect woman dead — or apparently so.

Each narrator in the novel is English and has an individual voice. The reader is given access to their most private mental and emotional spaces and permitted to share their innermost thoughts. The Beetle is closed off by virtue of foreignness and entomological metamorphoses in what is effectively structural silencing, and this magnifies her alterity and impedes sympathy. The Beetle does not even have a proper name except for a presumed alias signing off a scratched note to a prospective landlady. Namelessness renders the scarab/Arab unfamiliar and enigmatic. Keen notes how ‘naming of characters (including the withholding of a name [...] or a role-title in place of a full name, or allegorical or symbolic naming, etc) may play a role in the potential for character identification’, and identification is one route to fellow feeling.<sup>50</sup> The absence of a name is depersonalising, the attribution of an insect name dehumanising. Atherton does something similar with Paul Lessingham by sarcastically referring to him as the ‘Apostle’, a demeaning pun on his speechifying and first name.

Lessingham has a not altogether open disposition, his origins and behaviour questioned by Atherton and Marjorie’s father. His evasions cast a shadow of dishonesty upon him, and, until his ostensibly frank confession of attempted murder positioned late in the novel, there are only oblique references to hint at what prompted the Beetle to pursue him to London. The plot of *The Beetle* is not presented chronologically, which reinforces that the recounting of events is biased and unreliable. The second book of *The Beetle* is related by Sydney Atherton, a man intoxicated by alcohol, chemicals, power and envy. Marjorie Lindon’s third Book is the version of a traumatised woman who never wholly recovers from her ordeal. It transpires the first book is not even told directly by Robert Holt, but retrospectively

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<sup>50</sup> Keen, ‘Narrative Empathy’, 217. See also Keith Oatley, ‘A Taxonomy of the Emotions of Literary Response in Fictional Narrative’, *Poetics*, 23 (1994), 53–74.

transcribed by Marjorie from Holt's account when he lay malnourished and dying. Holt is filtered by Lindon, whose distressed and suggestible mind may inadvertently have imposed her own meaning onto the clerk's experiences of the Beetle. Augustus Champnell strives for professional objectivity, but, as a fictional character within the novel, he cannot be considered to report with the same neutrality as the 'Author' of the fourth book of *The Crime and the Criminal*.

Added to the layers of obfuscation is Marsh's unveiling of the story in a fragmented manner so key moments overlap and the interpretation of significant incidents becomes entirely dependent on the perspective of whichever participant is involved. This complicates the network of relations between Marsh and his narrators, between the narrators themselves, and between author, narrators, characters, and readers. Most of all it troubles the relations between everyone and the insect through whose eyes nothing is seen. 'I do not, of course, pretend to give you the exact text of her words' says Lessingham to Champnell.<sup>51</sup> As Judith Halberstam observes in *Skin Shows*, 'most Gothic novels lack the point of view of the monster.'<sup>52</sup> *The Beetle* is no exception.

Marsh's use of insect imagery is not confined to this novel alone. *The House of Mystery* published one year afterwards is also about mesmerism and features Augustus Champnell.<sup>53</sup> Most notable is the reprisal in *The House of Mystery* of the phrase 'noxious insect' occurring when the vulnerable and beautiful Madeleine Orme revolts at the advances of a leering rogue. 'He put his hand upon her shoulder. She shook it from her as if it had been the touch of some noxious insect'.<sup>54</sup> Marsh uses it again in *The Chase of the Ruby*, where the predatory Mr Burton's fingertips are

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<sup>51</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 211.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Marsh, *The House of Mystery* (London: F. V White & Co., 1898).

<sup>54</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 211; Marsh, *House of Mystery*, p. 11.

'brushed aside as if they were some noxious insect'.<sup>55</sup> In each case 'noxious insect' conveys intense loathing of a sexual pest.

Proximity to an undesirable insect is extremely unwelcome, and a single specimen on the shoulder is a motif I revisit in later chapters. Singly and in groups, insects trigger entomophobia such as when Marjorie Lindon treads on the Beetle's carpet and encounters multiple beetles underfoot. *The Joss: A Reversion* describes two young women on the verge of destitution taking possession of a dilapidated house inhabited by an apparently supernatural presence and vast numbers of beetles.<sup>56</sup>

"Why, it's beetles." She picked up her skirts, she gave a scream. [...] One crunched blackbeetles at every step. [...] "Where there aren't blackbeetles there's rats; and where there's either there's probably both [...] The only thing alive, barring rats, seems to be blackbeetles. We must have slaughtered thousands when we came in. The kitchen's black with them".<sup>57</sup>

Multitudinous beetles represent an infestation, signifying dirt and the contested occupation of the domestic space. A later novel by Marsh, *The Surprising Husband*, concerning a wife's discovery her husband is of mixed race, conflates fear of beetles with racial phobia. 'It had been one of the family jokes that Lucy would faint at the sight of a beetle, and that Evelyn would run a mile to avoid a nigger'.<sup>58</sup> In that instance, both aversions are presented as equally irrational. Across Marsh's oeuvre the job of interpreting a single beetle may be less straightforward than at first appears.

*The Surprising Husband* directly addresses blended heritage through George Vanderhorn, the husband of the title who initially espouses racism, but then becomes a victim of it as his black ancestry is exposed. The realisation of a hotel landlady that he is responsible for the non-whiteness of his wife's baby causes him to feel

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Chase of the Ruby* (London: Skeffington, 1900), p. 52.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Joss: A Reversion* (London: F. V. White & Co., 1901).

<sup>57</sup> Marsh, *Joss*, pp. 61-2, 112. Acheta Domestica comments how cockroaches were commonly misnamed blackbeetles, Acheta Domestica, *Episodes of Insect Life*, p. xvii.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Surprising Husband* (London: Methuen, 1908), p. 249.

catapulted down the hierarchies of class and animals. His emotional response is revealed clearly.

[There was] something in her eyes which filled him with a curious, unaccustomed sense of shame. He felt that she was regarding him with amusement, blended with curiosity, flavoured with contempt; as if he were something belonging to a different species from herself—one altogether beneath her.<sup>59</sup>

The interiority of George is available to the reader, who is invited to understand his feelings. The Beetle too may experience shame at her transmogrification into a lower species and the ensuing opprobrium to which she is then exposed, however this possibility is rarely if ever explored.

Höglund's article on *The Surprising Husband*' challenges the hitherto all too frequent positioning of Marsh as a xenophobic imperialist by referencing the biographical factors of the author's own mixed ethnicity and the enforced removal of his personal freedom during incarceration.<sup>60</sup> Höglund notes:

Marsh's personal history indicates that he speaks from a slightly unstable position with a voice that is never quite that of Anglo-Saxon, male authority. The fact that he was imprisoned and corporeally punished by the Victorian court does not turn him into a Gramscian subaltern by any means, but his position in relation to his society is still marginal in some respects.<sup>61</sup>

Höglund states: 'the fiction of Richard Marsh often disturbs the very discourses it relies on, allowing dissonant voices to surface. Some of these voices can be termed subaltern since they vie for space with much more conservative statements.'<sup>62</sup> Höglund is explicit he is using 'subaltern' in the Gramscian sense of a subordinate Other that encompasses women and the proletariat as well as Asian and African

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<sup>59</sup> Marsh, *Husband*, p. 129.

<sup>60</sup> Johan Höglund, 'Black Englishness and the Concurrent Voices of Richard Marsh in *The Surprising Husband*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 56.3 (2013), 275-291.

<sup>61</sup> Höglund, 'Husband', 277.

<sup>62</sup> Höglund, 'Husband', 277.

subjects of postcolonial discourse. In the context of *The Beetle*, Robert Holt is a prime example of an excluded man stripped of agency who does not speak for himself and whose history is interpreted by an intellectual of higher social standing in Marjorie Lindon. Holt is clearly subaltern, but the luckless clerk is not the only one in this position and worthy of sympathy. The racially and culturally constructed subalternity of the non-white woman turned insect ought to invite it too.

Marsh was a man of double identity: of German and English extraction; of a Christian mother and (probably) Jewish father; a jailbird and a socialite; a hybrid himself. This hybridity and attendant marginality manifest in his works in an unconscious alignment with figures in opposition to the establishment, an attitude potentially reinforced by the opinions of those with whom he fraternised. Aickman recalls how the Marshes were Sussex neighbours to the horse-breeding, poetic polemicist and anti-imperialist, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and ‘frolicked on the fringe of the adjoining Crabtree Park culture’, a culture that included ‘heroism’ and ‘home rule for everywhere’.<sup>63</sup> Blunt was a regular traveller to Egypt in connection with his Arabian stud business, he owned property in Cairo and was a vociferous supporter of the Egyptian nationalist and revolutionary, Colonel Ahmed Urabi Pasha.<sup>64</sup> This is not to say Marsh shared Blunt’s views, but to comment he was certainly exposed to them. Some aspects may have seeped into his writing.

Ailise Bulfin notes a degree of ‘ambivalence’ in *The Beetle*, opening it up to ‘both subversive, anti-imperial readings which see it covertly expressing Egyptian grievance against British policy as per Blunt, and conservative interpretations which see it painting a picture of a monstrous Egypt that needs to be suppressed.’<sup>65</sup> An overt

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<sup>63</sup> Marsh moved to Sussex in 1891. See Aickmann, p. 12; ‘The Author Whose Beetle Had More Bite Than Dracula’, *Crawley and Horley Observer*, 26 May 2017, <<https://www.crawleyobserver.co.uk/news/people/the-author-whose-beetle-had-more-bite-than-dracula-1-7980663>> [accessed 25 June 2021].

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Longford, *A Pilgrimage of Passion: The Life of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979).

<sup>65</sup> Ailise Bulfin, ‘Situating *The Beetle* Within the Fin-de-Siècle Fiction of Gothic Egypt’, in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp. 127-47 (p. 141).

imperialist position does indeed dominate the novel, but buried within it may be hidden sympathy for Egypt and even for the Beetle. It is not unfeasible an author of Jewish extraction might share a modicum of fellow feeling for a monster of Muslim and Oriental provenance. Historian of minorities, David Feldman describes the 'fragile solidarity' of the two groups suffering from the related prejudices of antisemitism and Islamophobia. Feldman comments: 'in the nineteenth century, Jews and Muslims were jointly conceived as Semites, bound by a linguistic and racial heritage as well as by Abrahamic monotheism.'<sup>66</sup> He subsequently observes how it was only after the 1917 alliance between the British Empire and Zionism 'that European notions of Muslims and Jews enter a new period: Jews ceased to be seen as "Oriental" '<sup>67</sup> Marsh was of mixed ancestry which in its broadest sense can be interpreted as not only white European, but also Jewish and Oriental. The Beetle was not wholly 'Other' to him. In some senses, though not in gender, he may have recognised her as the same.

Wayne Booth comments in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: '[i]f an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, then the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will help him.'<sup>68</sup> There are 'no prolonged inside views' of the Beetle so it follows there is no 'intense sympathy', but that does not equate to no sympathy whatsoever. The 'dissonant voice' as Höglund puts it of this subaltern scarab may be absent in narratorial terms, but this does not prevent the reader using imagination to expand the strategic bounds of sympathy and locate some pity for her plight.<sup>69</sup> By reference to her culture, her religion, and her history, she may be rescued from emotional exclusion as a coleopterous monster.

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<sup>66</sup> David Feldman, 'Muslims and Jews should be Fighting Hate Together', *Jewish Chronicle* <<https://www.thejc.com/comment/comment/muslims-and-jews-should-be-fighting-hate-together-1.448395>> [accessed 25 June 2021].

<sup>67</sup> Feldman, 'Muslims and Jews'.

<sup>68</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Chicago, IL: Univ of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 377-78.

<sup>69</sup> Höglund, 'Husband', 277.



## Redeeming the Coleopterous Monster

Theoretician of the monstrous, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen observes in the opening chapter of his postcolonially influenced *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity*: 'For subaltern groups [...] collectivisation can be a process of dehumanisation, locking its victims into an abject category like barbarian, beast or monster.'<sup>70</sup> Marsh's subaltern woman is dehumanised into abject categories of coleopterous and monstrous. Within the text of *The Beetle*, her monstrosity is repeatedly asserted: she is 'a monstrous conception of some dreadful vision'; 'some monstrous member [of the family of arthropods], of the like I had never heard or read'; 'a monstrous creature of the beetle type'; 'rather of a monster than a human being'; 'a monstrous beetle'; 'some female monster'; and 'such a monster'.<sup>71</sup>

'Monster' is a freighted word defined by the OED in its original physiological meaning as: 'a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance', later extended to describe an 'ugly or deformed person, animal, or thing', and then metaphorically to indicate a wicked nature.<sup>72</sup> Many of these aspects of monstrosity are embodied in Marsh's oversized insect woman. Writing on monsters, Stephen T. Asma comments:

Animals are [...] conceptualised on a continuum of strangeness: first, non native species, then familiar beasts with unfamiliar sizes or modified body parts, then hybrids of surprising combination, and finally, at the further margins, shape shifters and indescribable creatures.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York, NY and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Marsh, *Beetle* pp. 16, 17, 116, 181, 215, 269, 271.

<sup>72</sup> OED online. <<https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/121738> > [Accessed 04 July 2021].

<sup>73</sup> Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), p. 26.

The Beetle exists at the further margin of Asma's 'continuum of strangeness' in that she is not so much a hybrid of blended and fixed form, she is a creature who undergoes several reversible metamorphoses. If there are degrees of monstrosity, then as a shape shifter the Beetle is extremely monstrous.

Although Cohen's investigations into monstrosity originate in Medieval scholarship, his general observations may usefully be applied to works of later periods, and a close reading of Cohen's 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' alongside Marsh's nineteenth-century novel goes some way towards redeeming its coleopterous monster.<sup>74</sup> The Beetle inhabits what Robert Tally identifies as a 'Teratocene, an age of monsters', which Tally links to social revolution and capitalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century and to imperialism and increasing globalisation at its end.<sup>75</sup> Within this later cultural space the Beetle collapses time and species and is capable of being read as synecdochic of her race and the geographical region epitomised by her sex. Bradley Deane in 'Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt' speaks of the gendered logic of 1890s Punch cartoons depicting Egypt as a 'shrouded woman of Orientalist fantasy' or an alluring female 'in which 'political and sexual possibilities salaciously converge'.<sup>76</sup> The Beetle falls victim to a similar reductionism. To approach her via each of Cohen's theses is to grasp something of her perspective. Possibly it is also to locate aspects of what is sympathetic in the woman turned scarab.

The Beetle is a foreign big bug woman with mesmeric abilities at large in London, having infiltrated the very heart of the British Empire to get her own back on the man who wronged her. On the face of it, she possesses no redeeming qualities whatsoever. There is nothing to like, nothing with which to identify, nothing with

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<sup>74</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25.

<sup>75</sup> Robert T. Tally Jr, 'Teratology as Ideology Critique; Or A Monster Under Every Bed', *The New Americanist* (March 2019), 7-22.

<sup>76</sup> Bradley Deane, 'Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt: Imperial Striptease', *ELT*, 51.4 (2008), 381-410 (pp. 381, 382).

which to sympathise, and a great deal to fear. She is a coleopterous monster from a colonised country, a blend of eastern lore and horror which is a typical component of what Patrick Brantlinger calls Imperial Gothic.<sup>77</sup> In 'Imperial Gothic: Atavism and the Occult', Brantlinger envisages the genre being comprised of three key elements: 'regression, invasion, and the waning of adventure'.<sup>78</sup> He notes that 1882 was the year the British invaded Egypt and the Society of Psychical Research was founded and he proposes the coincidental simultaneous development of imperialism and occultism can be viewed as twin 'emergent pseudo religions' fused in one literary form.<sup>79</sup> Brantlinger explicitly locates Imperial Gothic within the timeframe 1880-1914 and Marsh's *The Beetle* arrives bang in the middle of it closely followed by *The Goddess* (1900) influenced by India, and *The Joss* (1901) by China. Marsh is, however, conspicuously absent from Brantlinger's initial list of Imperial Gothic authors, which includes R. L. Stevenson, Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker, H. G. Wells and Arthur Machen. Marsh scholarship was languishing in the mid to late 1980s when Brantlinger was writing on Imperial Gothic and it may be that he considered Marsh insufficiently noteworthy for inclusion in key exponents of the genre. Brantlinger expands on the genre characteristics in *Rule of Darkness*:

'Imperial Gothic combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult [...] the link with occultism is especially symptomatic of the anxieties that attended the climax of the British Empire.'<sup>80</sup>

The monster of *The Beetle* is exemplary of a colonised subject, cowed and salaaming, yet simultaneously posing a terrifying supernatural threat, magical and vengeful. By

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<sup>77</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic: Atavism and the Occult in The British Adventure novel: 1880-1914', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 28.3 (1985), 243-52. Franco Moretti's quantitative assessment of forty-four novelistic genres between 1740 and 1914 identifies the late-Victorian era as the heyday of Imperial Gothic, Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic: Atavism', 250.

<sup>79</sup> Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic, Atavism', 246.

<sup>80</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1988), pp. 227-28.

2012 when Brantlinger re-visits the theme of Imperial Gothic in *Victorian Gothic*, he does cite Marsh.<sup>81</sup>

Halberstam comments in *Skin Shows* how ‘fear and monstrosity are historically specific forms rather than psychological universals’.<sup>82</sup> Even Shildrick, whose stated intention is to adopt a transhistorical stance, admits: ‘what counts as normative, and indeed as monstrous, is always caught up in historically and culturally specific determinants’.<sup>83</sup> *The Beetle* is a post-Darwinian text situated at the impending twilight of Empire, and Halberstam’s following observation, although not directly referring to Marsh, speaks well to his creation. ‘Novels in a Gothic mode transform class and race, sexual and national relations into supernatural or monstrous features. The threat posed by the Gothic monster is a combination of money, science, perversion, and imperialism’.<sup>84</sup> Howard L. Malchow identifies a literary subgenre of ‘racial gothic’, and this chapter considers *The Beetle* in terms of those linked aspects of imperialism and race to navigate between opposing incarnations of the Egyptian as a subaltern with minimal power and as a soldier of independence and vengeance.<sup>85</sup>

Postcolonial critic Henry Schwarz perceives a world conceptually divided into what he calls the ‘Orient vs. the Orientalists’, and Edward W. Said’s canonical *Orientalism* is a strong interpretative influence on Marsh’s novel.<sup>86</sup> There is insufficient space to address Said in detail or fully to trace the development of his ideas, however I do not fail to keep in mind his postscript to *Orientalism* in *Culture and Imperialism*:

never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; there

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<sup>81</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Imperial Gothic’, in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 24.

<sup>83</sup> Shildrick, p. 29.

<sup>84</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p. 24.

<sup>85</sup> Howard L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), p. 231.

<sup>86</sup> Henry Schwarz, ‘Introduction’, in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), pp. 1-20 (p. 10); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [1978] (London: Penguin, 2003).

was always some form of active resistance, and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out.<sup>87</sup>

Said is speaking of nationalism rather than fictional plots, and the intention here is not to debate the defeat or effectiveness of resistance of the non-Westerner, but to expose something of what lies beneath the Beetle's monstrous carapace buried by the ethnocentric discourse of imperialism.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks 'Can the subaltern speak?', and the linked question in this thesis is whether the subaltern scarab can speak in the senses of being allowed to do so by her author and being physically capable of doing so as an insect.<sup>88</sup> I hold the Beetle to be female, and Spivak is explicit about the relationship between sex and deeper subalternity. 'If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow [...] within this effaced itinerary of the subaltern, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced'.<sup>89</sup> For a Caucasian academic to attempt to speak for the non-white woman turned coleopterous monster is to risk exposing the exercise to the accusation of an appropriation of female colonial feelings. It is a point made by, among others, Y. T. Vinayaraj.<sup>90</sup> Keen calls it 'cultural imperialism of the emotions' and foresees a danger it might compromise accurate sympathetic representation or indeed interpretation.<sup>91</sup> This thesis views it as a risk worth taking if a new reading of the character returns to the Egyptian her history, identity, humanity and even her animality.

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<sup>87</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xii.

<sup>88</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (1988), 271-313.

<sup>89</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'History', in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), pp. 198-312 (p. 273). This is Spivak's updated version of her canonical essay.

<sup>90</sup> Y. T. Vinayaraj, 'Representation of the Subaltern: Spivak and Historiography', *Mar Thoma Theological Journal of Theology*, 2.2 (2013), 1-9.

<sup>91</sup> Keen, 'Narrative Empathy', 223.

The Beetle is a colonial subject and a victim of the epistemic violence of imperialism which constructs her as a monster. In his first thesis of monstrosity, Cohen asserts: 'The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body', which is apposite for the entity who is first and foremost Egyptian.<sup>92</sup> Vuohelainen suggests the large size of the Beetle's nose calls upon Jewish stereotypes.<sup>93</sup> My argument, in line with Feldman, is that to be Muslim and Oriental in 1897 would not preclude also being considered Semitic. The Beetle's monstrous body is non-Christian, non-European, non-white and non-human. The otherness stemming from her North African origin is exemplified by her human physiology as well as her insect morphology, and Marsh represents both aspects primarily, even hyperbolically, as repugnant.<sup>94</sup> The othering coded in the metaphor of the unfeasibly large scarab works to magnify the threat from her as a colonised subject. Simultaneously, the mechanism of racially informed speciesism excludes her from her own narrative and relegates her to subaltern status. She is depersonalised and dehumanised, classified amongst insects, the minima of sentient beings. Worse than that, her former lover, designates her 'noxious': the adjective repeatedly used by William Kirby and William Spence in *Introduction to Entomology* to describe insects deemed to be dangerous pests, invaders, or contaminators.

To the Londoners, the Beetle is oversized vermin, the stuff of nightmares with a mind that is an unreadable text and with faculties that are unfathomable, not least because insect morphology is so utterly alien to that of humans. One physical difference among many is the absence of an audible communication system. Beetles can unsheathe their wings and fly, making a buzzing noise while they do so. Some stridulate, but beetles are incapable of any vocal sound apart from a hiss when agitated. As a nice nod to this ability, Marsh describes the human incarnation of the beetle as hissing on three separate occasions. When she manifests as an insect, the

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<sup>92</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, ' "You Know Not of What You Speak": Language, Identity and Xenophobia in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle: A Mystery* (1897)', in *Fear, Loathing, and Victorian Xenophobia*, ed. by Marlene Tromp, Maria K Bachman and Heidi Kaufman (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2013), pp. 312-30.

<sup>94</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 16.

Beetle has neither voice nor access to language. The scarab is a subaltern who quite literally cannot speak.

In human form, the Woman of the Songs as she was known in her native land, has a tongue and vocal cords. What comes out of her mouth in London is stilted and harsh, 'a rasping voice, with its queer foreign twang'.<sup>95</sup> Holt's account at a point he believes the Beetle to be male notes the Beetle's breathlessness and attributes it to rage. 'I know not how long he continued speechless. When his breath returned, it was with chokings and gaspings, in the midst of which he hissed out his words, as if their mere passage through his throat brought him near to strangulation.'<sup>96</sup> These respiratory difficulties may of course result from the throttling in Cairo, the awful event of two decades past to which the reader is not made privy until much later in the novel. At any rate, the Beetle sings her 'weird and thrilling' Eastern harmonies no more.<sup>97</sup> Kelly Hurley's comment in *The Gothic Body* is apt: 'her words and emotions are always filtered by the distaste and revulsion of the characters relating them', and those characters are all racially, ethnically, and religiously in opposition to the Beetle.<sup>98</sup> Grotesquely unappealing, unrecognisable even as female, the Oriental woman is presented in such a way as to make an objective assessment of her all but impossible.

Only Atherton, the narrator of Book II, a skilled entomologist and amateur Egyptologist approaches anything like an understanding of the Beetle when he considers her solely as an insect. Observing her photographic image, he is immediately able to classify her taxonomy as '*Scarabaeus sacer*', and when she is directly in front of him, he makes the intellectual connection between her species and its entanglement with Egyptian mythology.<sup>99</sup> In the light of Atherton's binomial

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<sup>95</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 51.

<sup>96</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 53.

<sup>97</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 209-10.

<sup>98</sup> Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 130.

<sup>99</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 114.

precision, Hurley's comment: 'even in her avatar of the beetle she resists enclosure within the boundary of a definite species classification' would seem to be at odds with the evidence.<sup>100</sup> Atherton knows what species she is and where she comes from. Roger Luckhurst in *The Mummy's Curse* is virtually alone of Marsh critics in appreciating that: ' "The apotheosis of the beetle" [...] is suggestive of the Ancient Egyptian worship of the scarab beetle as a master of eternal life'.<sup>101</sup> This thesis extends Luckhurst's point to maintain the 'apotheosis of the beetle' is more than 'suggestive' of eternal life, it is an explicit reference to Ancient Egyptian worship unlikely to be anything other than deliberate. The beetle is *Scarabaeus egyptorum* and this is of paramount importance. She is not just any random species of beetle. Associated as she is with specific colouring, morphology, culture and geography, she is effectively a specific *race* of beetle.

Race and gender are intertwined. The business of imperial expansion politically, administratively, and militaristically is a male enterprise as emphasised by Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*.<sup>102</sup> In Orientalist discourse, lands and peoples to be conquered and controlled are constructed as essentially feminine, a fact Said identifies in *Orientalism*, and reiterates in 'Orientalism Reconsidered'.<sup>103</sup> To apply this gendering of space on a global scale would be to say the invading Occident is male and the invaded Orient is female, supporting my contention the Beetle is culturally female. Phrases juxtaposed either side of the colon in Marsh's titles are highly indicative of how he intends his creation to be seen. Neil Hultgren observes of the opposing nouns of *The Goddess: A Demon*: 'one is designating a beneficent female deity and another a harmful supernatural entity'.<sup>104</sup> *The Joss: A Reversion* shows how a Chinese idol is coupled with a regression to an

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<sup>100</sup> Hurley, *Gothic Body*, p. 130.

<sup>101</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Mummy's Curse: The True History of a Dark Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), p. 172.

<sup>102</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).

<sup>103</sup> Edward Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', *Cultural Critique* (Autumn 1985), 89-107 (p. 103).

<sup>104</sup> Neil Hultgren, 'Automata, Plot Machinery and the Imperial Gothic in Richard Marsh's *The Goddess*', in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp. 148-70 (p. 148).



earlier state. *The Beetle: A Mystery* indicates the eponymous insect monster may be a manifestation of the Mysterious East. Lack of sympathy for her is tantamount to lack of sympathy for her region, her race, and her religion.

In Cohen's terminology, the body of the monster is a 'Cultural Body', and in Marsh's novel the body of the monster is also a racial body. Halberstam too notes the importance of race within the topography of nineteenth-century monstrosity, and comments: 'Gothic deploys monstrosity to condense negative meaning into bodies with highly specific sexual, *racial* and class codings' [my emphasis].<sup>105</sup> The Beetle's ethnicity is repeatedly emphasised, not just superficially through clothing, but at a deeper level through her colouring and face. The novel's characters employ a racial stereotyping of Egyptian physiognomy comparing it unfavourably to that of the Anglo males and expressing it in a vocabulary which would not pass muster in more enlightened times. The clerk, Holt refers to 'blubber lips' and, in more anthropological mode, Atherton re-iterates this view: 'His lips were thick and shapeless,—and this [...] seemed to suggest that, in his veins there ran more than a streak of negro blood'.<sup>106</sup> Importantly, in a climate of pseudo-scientific ethnology, the Beetle is shown to be acutely aware of the superiority of white skin. She passionately praises Lessingham's physique and complexion: 'he is tall,—his skin is white; he is strong—do I not know that he is strong—how strong!—oh yes!'<sup>107</sup> Even the emaciated and emasculated Holt has skin enviably white. 'What a white skin you have,—how white! What would I not give for a skin as white as that,—ah yes!'<sup>108</sup> The Beetle's description of Lessingham's fiancée, Marjorie, as she 'with the lily face, the corn-hued hair', reveals appreciation heavily tinged with jealousy.<sup>109</sup> Caucasian features, the Beetle admires. Her own repulsive physiognomy evokes reactions of disgust, perhaps even in herself.

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<sup>105</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, pp. 21, 43, 59.

<sup>106</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 19, 106.

<sup>107</sup> Marsh, *Beetle* p. 30.

<sup>108</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 21.

<sup>109</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 53.

The colour associated with the Beetle is yellow, not white, and it is not sunshine yellow, but the yellow of ill health, uncleanness, almost putrefaction. Frankenstein's monstrous creature also has ugly, yellow skin: the 'vile insect' with hands 'in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy [...] his face of such loathsome yet appalling hideousness', and he too pursues 'diabolical vengeance to extremity'.<sup>110</sup> In this he resembles the Beetle, but, unlike her, he is a self-confessed murderer who 'strangled the innocent as they slept and grasped to death his throat who never injured me'.<sup>111</sup> He proclaims: 'I seek no fellow feeling in my misery. No sympathy may I ever find', but his author's narratorial strategy of sharing his inmost thoughts solicits sympathy for him outside of his text. In contrast, the Beetle, who is a victim – Lessingham graphically tells how he 'clutched her throat between my hands' – receives antipathy within and without her novel.<sup>112</sup>

Her yellow skin is less a symptom of post-mortem discolouration than indicative of being a different, 'inferior' race. 'Either, the body itself was slightly phosphorescent, or it was of a peculiar yellow hue'; 'the skin, which was a saffron yellow'; 'his skin was still as yellow as saffron'; 'his yellow fangs gleamed through his parted lips'; 'he [wore] a burnoose,—the yellow, grimy-looking article of the Arab of the Soudan'; 'A thin, yellow, wrinkled hand was protruding from amidst the heap of rugs'.<sup>113</sup> 1897 was the year in which sociologist and francophone, Jacques Novicow, coined the term *Le Péril Jaune* (The Yellow Peril) to designate a western fear of the East, indeterminate as to country and encompassing a white sexual nervousness of being overrun by a dangerous alien culture.<sup>114</sup> It is likely the orientalist concept of the 'yellow peril' was absorbed into British culture by the time *The Beetle* was being written so that yellow becomes a freighted word. It was one used by M. P. Shiel in his serialised story, *The Empress of the Earth: The Tale of the Yellow War*, which ran from

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<sup>110</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pp. 102, 221, 222.

<sup>111</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 224.

<sup>112</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 218.

<sup>113</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 17, 19, 27, 53, 69, 201.

<sup>114</sup> Jacques Novicow, *Le Péril Jaune* (Paris: V. Giard & E. Briere, 1897).

February to June 1898 in C. A. Pearson's *Short Stories Magazine* and was published a few months later by Grant Richards as *The Yellow Danger*.<sup>115</sup> Marsh's Beetle is indisputably Egyptian, yet also generically 'oriental to the finger-tips'.<sup>116</sup> She is explicitly described as Oriental on sixteen occasions, primarily in conversations between Atherton and Lessingham. By them, certainly, although not necessarily by their author, she is viewed as a Gothicised 'yellow peril' in the heart of London.

Whiteness in *The Beetle* is an object of desire associated with Christianity, and 'white Christian women' are sacrificed: 'the sacrificial object was a woman, stripped to the skin, as white as you or I'.<sup>117</sup> To borrow Spivak's terminology, the ethnocentric Subject establishes itself by selectively defining an Other. In Marsh's text the western, human Subject is set against an eastern, insect Other, and whiteness is one way of establishing a shared kinship group in opposition to yellowness or brownness. It constructs and defines the strategic bounds of sympathy, which in 1897 may not have been confined to the text but extended to the readership as well. The Beetle is repellent and must be repelled. Her presumably enchanting face when a Cairene girl is never put into words. She is not just a colonised subject who is effectively silenced, she is one not truly seen in her human aspect.

Marsh's insect monstrosity stands in stark contrast to the positive valence of western occult and esoteric writings on ancient Egypt also finding expression in fiction of the time. Marie Corelli's contemporary novel, *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* describes her eponymous supernatural Egyptian having: 'an exquisite face, fair as a lily, and of such perfect loveliness that the men who were gathered round her seemed to lose breath and speech at the sight of it'.<sup>118</sup> Corelli's creation is mesmerisingly beautiful, yet, despite the stark difference in the aesthetic responses Ziska and the Beetle evoke and the consequent sympathy they are afforded, they have much in

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<sup>115</sup> M. P. Shiel, *The Yellow Danger* (London: Grant Richards, 1898).

<sup>116</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 113.

<sup>117</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 270, 214.

<sup>118</sup> Marie Corelli, *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1897), p. 59.

common: sex, race, nationality, and a mixture of desire and hatred for the lover who murdered them in a past life. Where the characters differ, apart from in looks, is in the site of their unfolding stories. The Beetle is obliged to pursue Lessingham to London. Ziska waits for her man to come to her. Ziska never strays far from her place of origin and the British are, so to speak, at the heart of her empire, where their complexions are unsuited to the climate and for whom the local accents and customs are strange. These invaders are not so much monstrous as comical, and Corelli's text balances Marsh's because of its entirely different slant on Anglo-Egyptian relations and their respective superiorities.

Corelli's eastern city, native inhabitants and colonial subjects are sympathetically presented, but are still western constructs containing observations from a British eye. Her Egyptian inspiration came from admiration of Rider Haggard's *She* and not from direct personal experience, apart from her own alleged mystical connection with the land and ancient civilisation. Corelli's correspondence with her publisher expresses envy at Haggard having travelled to Egypt, something which she never did, nor Marsh nor Stoker.<sup>119</sup> They were reliant on knowledge acquired at home, or next door to home since Stoker's Dublin mentor and neighbour was Sir William Wilde, Oscar's father, a collector of antiquities and extensive traveller to ancient sites including Saqqara.<sup>120</sup>

W. T. Stead's review of *Ziska* describes it as 'the latest phase of Marie Corelli's dealing with occultism'.<sup>121</sup> Her text, driven by a passion for eastern esotericism, lends force to Brantlinger's argument in *Taming Cannibals*, that late-Victorian literary discourse on non-white races 'was never so monolithic nor so uniformly negative as

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<sup>119</sup> Marie Corelli to George Bentley, 16 March 1887, quoted in Annette Federico, *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 90. Stoker never visited Transylvania either, Christopher Frayling, *Lord Byron to Count Dracula* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1991).

<sup>120</sup> Luckhurst, 'Mummy's Curse: Dark Fantasy', p. 173.

<sup>121</sup> W. T. Stead, ' "Ziska," the Problem of a Wicked Soul', *Borderland*, 4.2 (1897), 213–15 (p. 213).

Said suggests'.<sup>122</sup> Brantlinger is commenting upon Said's conceptualisation of a *fin-de-siècle* Orientalist attitude arising out of a west/east binary that viewed Egyptians as degenerate and sexually exotic, biologically alien, inscrutable and unclean. Said's *Orientalism* finds late nineteenth-century Orientalist writing, of which Marsh's novel is often taken as an example: 'shot through with doctrines of European superiority, various kinds of racism, imperialism, and the like, dogmatic views of "the Oriental" as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction'.<sup>123</sup> *The Beetle* with its ethnocentric stance in many ways typifies this position, ostensibly sharing Acheta Domestica's dim view of the sacred scarab, but it is tempered by Marsh's own background and the occasional chinks visible in the carapace of his monstrous creation.

Returning to Cohen's 'Monster Culture', his second observation is that 'The Monster Always Escapes'.<sup>124</sup> It is only during Champnell's narrative where events take place at breakneck speed that the Egyptian at last gives the impression of being able to be pinned down, an outcome facilitated by her refraining from metamorphosing. There is power in monstrosity and the less the Beetle is monstrous insect, the more she is vulnerable. Even Holt on his deathbed refers to her without her usual capitalisation as 'the beetle', as if she is diminished.<sup>125</sup> Racing away from her pursuers in cabs and trains instead of unsheathing her wings and flying, she desperately tries to escape to the channel ports until thwarted by the *deus ex machina* of a railway accident. Together with reports of the spontaneous blowing up of her fellow beetles in the desert, this might indicate the foreign threat has been permanently eradicated. Having briefly occupied London, the "noxious insect" from Cairo is apparently purged from the imperial body, however, beetles are notoriously resilient. The full title of the novel is *The Beetle: A Mystery*, and the Mystery is not only the Mysterious East, the text itself is also mysterious in that its conclusion remains unresolved. The closing

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<sup>122</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 2011), p. 93. Corelli's eastern esotericism will be more fully explored in Chapter Three.

<sup>123</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 8.

<sup>124</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 278.

sentence reads: 'it cannot be certainly shown that the Thing is not still existing—a creature born neither of God nor man.'<sup>126</sup> The detective, and by extension the reader, is left with a niggling suspicion that the unclassifiable remains found in the smashed-up railway carriage might mean the creature is not obliterated. When Lessingham strangles the Egyptian woman in Cairo, she metamorphoses into a giant Beetle to preserve her life. Once again on the point of dying, she may undergo another transformation. As Cohen puts it: 'No monster tastes of death but once [...] the monster's body is both corporeal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift'.<sup>127</sup>

Cohen's third thesis claims 'The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis', and although Marsh's title is explicit the monster is a beetle, on many occasions within the text, in Cohen's words, she 'refuses easy categorisation'.<sup>128</sup> The first book of *The Beetle* shows Holt unclear if the creature is spider or insect, human or part animal, bird of prey or vulpine. The last book describes the traces of the Beetle in vague terms as 'the blood of some wild animal—possibly of some creature of the cat species' or as 'some sort of viscid matter, probably the excretion of some variety of lizard'.<sup>129</sup> The remains of Marsh's monster seem to incorporate a bewildering multiplicity of species. Pandora Sypererek, however, is convinced the residue is entomological in origin and persuasively cites Adam Dodd's *Beetle* in support:<sup>130</sup>

the 'viscid matter' of unspecified color is surely haemolymph, 'a colourless, yellow or green fluid which moves freely around inside the body during locomotion' and is responsible for beetles' reputation for gooey-ness. [...] the Beetle is distinctly insect. Dead or not, the secretions of the beetle remain.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 295.

<sup>127</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Cohen 'Monster Culture', p. 6.

<sup>129</sup> Marsh, *Beetle* p. 292.

<sup>130</sup> Sypererek, 'Gendered Metamorphoses', pp. 63-187.

<sup>131</sup> Sypererek, p. 181.

This thesis concurs. Alive or deceased, the essence of the monster and her novel is to be found in her coleopteran nature.

The Beetle is primarily the 'Harbinger of a Category Crisis' in the threat she poses to the supposedly unassailable identity of white, western males at the top of the evolutionary scale. The Egyptian Beetle is a dark female and with darkness come associations of strength, not inferiority. In contrast to her, Marsh's men of England are almost exclusively fair, even down to the railway inspector, and fairness in men is not necessarily advantageous. Pitiable Holt is described as 'weak and white'; and 'not bad-looking,—in a milk and watery sort of way. He had pale blue eyes and very fair hair'.<sup>132</sup> Fair colouring is not used positively in this instance to exemplify kinship, but negatively to denote physical weakness, particularly upon contact with the dark foreigner.

Marsh himself contained elements of the dark foreigner through his father's bloodline. In *The Beetle*, were it to come to a competition for survival against a colonised opponent possessed of supernatural powers, there exists the uncomfortable possibility British men may not be up to the task. Neither physical force nor political finesse are sufficient to keep her at bay. Lessingham is certainly unable to offer much in the way of resistance to the Beetle's advances either sexual or vengeful. He, 'the rising-hope-of-the-Radicals' catches her muteness and is robbed of his famous oratorical ability.<sup>133</sup> He is not even able to remain upright when confronted with her insect image on a piece of paper:

a look came on to his face which, literally, transfigured him. His hat and umbrella fell from his grasp on to the floor. He retreated, gibbering [...] he had shrunk lower inch by inch till he was actually crouching on his haunches.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 177.

<sup>133</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 72.

<sup>134</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 80.

Hat and umbrella, protective accoutrements of civilised dress are dropped. Coherent speech deserts him. He adopts an apelike position in a degenerative metamorphosis repeated and intensified on another occasion. At the mere mention of the Beetle's name: 'he collapsed—was transformed; [...] sank in a heap on the floor; he held up his hands above his head; and he gibbered,—like some frenzied animal'.<sup>135</sup> Just as Lessingham causes the Woman of the Songs to change into an insect, so she causes him, late-Victorian *Homo sapiens* to revert to a more primitive life form. Similar to her transformation, his too makes him inarticulate.

Faced with the Egyptian menace, Lessingham becomes less of a man. 'Was there ever a man so less than nothing?'<sup>136</sup> By implication, his rapid evolutionary reversal may, for a *fin-de-siècle* reader, presage the contraction and decline of Empire. Atavism is one of Brantlinger's central themes of Imperial Gothic. He suggests: 'the atavistic descents into the primordial experienced by its characters are unconscious allegorisations of the larger regression movements of imperialism as a whole', and the not unjustified claim of the colonised to assert independence.<sup>137</sup> Power positions and species hierarchies are not immutable. There is movement between species and, as Shildrick notes, there is transference from 'the monstrous other whose very presence signals the threat of contamination'.<sup>138</sup>

*The Beetle* reveals a close sometimes uncomfortable interrelation between the British men and their city, and characteristics of the Egyptian woman are transmitted to them so that physically and visually they are compelled to be in sympathetic affinity with her. Holt himself becomes 'invertebrate' in the presence of the giant insect: 'a metamorphosis took place in the very abysses of my being'.<sup>139</sup> Lessingham at the sight of the 'dull golden green [...] capitally executed drawing of a

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<sup>135</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 148.

<sup>136</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 51.

<sup>137</sup> Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic, Atavism', p. 247.

<sup>138</sup> Shildrick, p. 7.

<sup>139</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 18, 28.



beetle' goes 'green and yellow'.<sup>140</sup> Contact with the Beetle induces nausea, causing white complexions to take on her colouration. Even inanimate objects experience the same effect: the very suburb in which the Beetle makes her lair is scattered with stacks of 'bilious looking bricks', and the train on which the Beetle apparently dies 'vomited forth smoke'.<sup>141</sup> White and yellow, body and city, race and space, monster and man are not discrete entities, they are inextricably linked. There is a crisis of category, a destroying of distinctions. Monstrosity spreads.

Cohen's fourth thesis, 'The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference' states, 'the monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us'.<sup>142</sup> I substitute 'exoskeletal' for 'flesh' to reveal how in *The Beetle* 'the monster is difference made [exoskeletal] come to dwell among us', and hers is indeed a difference 'cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual'.<sup>143</sup> Spivak observes: 'everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern — a space of difference.'<sup>144</sup> Cohen echoes this sentiment in *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity* where he identifies monstrosity and subalternity being marked by difference and excluded from the 'normative' centre. 'It will often seem that between those who have been "othered" (represented as inferior, bestial, monstrous) and those who belong to some domineering collective [...] exists a firm line of segregation.'<sup>145</sup> The Beetle exists behind a 'firm line of segregation' that puts her beyond strategic bounded sympathy, inhabiting a 'space of difference' that takes concrete form in her coleopterous corpus. Not only are insects 'Humanity's Other' as Eric Brown observes, but, as Charlotte Sleight maintains: 'There is a good case for regarding them as zoology's Other, the definitive organisms of *différance*'.<sup>146</sup> To be a bug is to be as different as can be,

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<sup>140</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 114, 115.

<sup>141</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 186, 291.

<sup>142</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 7.

<sup>143</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 7.

<sup>144</sup> Leon De Kock, 'Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* (23 July 1992), 29-47 (p. 45).

<sup>145</sup> Cohen, *Hybridity*, p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> Brown, 'Introduction', *Insect Poetics*, p. xi; Charlotte Sleight, 'Inside Out: The Unsettling Nature of Insects', in *Insect Poetics*, pp. 281-97 (p. 281).

segregated by six legs and a segmented body. Cohen refers to the *Chansons de Geste* of Medieval France justifying the Crusades 'by transforming Muslims into demonic caricatures whose menacing lack of humanity was readable from their bestial attributes'.<sup>147</sup> Centuries later Marsh transforms a Muslim woman into a demonic caricature with beetle attributes.

Atherton defines the Egyptian as an 'unbaptised Mohammedan', although he does later change his mind, declaring '[t]here was something about him which was distinctly not Mussulmanic'.<sup>148</sup> Elliott Colla notes in *Conflicted Antiquities* that late nineteenth-century 'orientalist discourse sought to separate ancient Egypt from the lives of modern Egyptians', and Atherton struggles to reconcile the historical continuity between the ancient Egyptian of the far past. and the modern Egyptian of the *fin-de-siècle* present.<sup>149</sup> He perceives such an abyssal gap between them that he codes the ancient aspect as female and the modern as male, to which this thesis attributes much of the gender confusion in the novel. What he does not lose sight of, and nor do any of the other characters, is the Beetle's monstrous difference, a difference as Cohen expresses it: 'abjected onto foreigners or subalterns, people represented as not in possession of full humanity.'<sup>150</sup>

Cohen's fifth thesis, 'The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible', contains his observation that 'The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot — *must not* — be crossed'.<sup>151</sup> Applying this theory to Marsh's novel throws into high relief one function of the Beetle's insect body, which is to prevent any further sexual couplings between Lessingham and the Cairene Woman of the Songs. Her monstrosity is the site of antipathy, functioning as counterpart to the

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<sup>147</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture' p. 7.

<sup>148</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 73, 106.

<sup>149</sup> Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2007), p. 129.

<sup>150</sup> Cohen, *Hybridity*, p. 7.

<sup>151</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', pp. 12-13.

mature female ugliness indicative of reproductive unsuitability. She cries out, 'Is there a better thing than to be his wife? his well-beloved? the light of his eyes? Is there for a woman a happier chance? Oh no, not one! His wife! —Paul Lessingham'. Her embodiment as a 'noxious insect' absolutely prohibits this possibility and places her far beyond the bounds of being a feasible spousal choice.<sup>152</sup> She is instead, 'the wife of his scorn! the despised and rejected!'<sup>153</sup> Sexual congress with a beetle is physically impossible and insect monstrosity avoids any 'unholy miscegenation'.<sup>154</sup> There will be no mixed-race baby as in Marsh's *The Surprising Husband*. 'The monster of prohibition' manifested in beetle form performs a eugenicist function in policing selective breeding within a racially and religiously 'uncontaminated' group.

In his sixth thesis, Cohen posits that 'Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire.'<sup>155</sup> Lessingham fears and loathes the Beetle now, but as an eighteen-year-old tourist in Cairo, he desired what she represented and relates it to Champnell. 'I went out one night into the town in search of amusement, I went, unaccompanied, into the native quarter'.<sup>156</sup> Marsh's manuscript differs from the text. It reads 'I went on—unaccompanied', with 'on' emphasising Lessingham's persistence, and the crossing out of 'I found myself [unaccompanied]' reinforcing there was nothing arbitrary about his actions.<sup>157</sup> He admits to having been a bored young man 'eager for something which had in it a spice of adventure'.<sup>158</sup> His vocabulary smacks euphemistically of a privileged, white, western male seeking a sexual encounter with a brown, eastern female, with all the associated exploitative power relations which that entails. It is a point forcefully made in *Orientalism* by Said, who comments: 'the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unavailable in Europe'.<sup>159</sup> Phillipa Levine

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<sup>152</sup> Marsh, *Beetle* p. 30.

<sup>153</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 30.

<sup>154</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 14.

<sup>155</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 16.

<sup>156</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 208.

<sup>157</sup> Marsh manuscript, p. 106.

<sup>158</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 208.

<sup>159</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 190.

reiterates in *Prostitution, Race and Politics* how colonial women were regarded as potential or actual prostitutes and ‘the colonies depicted as a giant brothel’.<sup>160</sup> It is a reasonable assumption that Lessingham was availing himself of a sexual opportunity in Cairo where the body of a native woman might appear to him as a commodity for immediate use and of negligible value.



Figure I:4

Edwin Longsden Long,  
*An Egyptian Girl with a Sistrum*  
(1886)

Oil on Panel, 27 x 20 inches,  
The Maas Gallery, London

Stereotypical tropes of the Orient were fixed in popular visual culture of the time in pictorial images of Ancient Egypt and colonial objects of desire produced by Orientalist painters such as Edwin Longsden Long (1829-1891) and Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912). Their artwork, imbued with scholarly accuracy, was appreciated by connoisseurs and amateurs alike. Longsden Long's *Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875) is probably his most famous piece and depicts women ranked in order of

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<sup>160</sup> Phillipa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 182.

beauty and fairness being auctioned off as brides.<sup>161</sup> He was no stranger to portraying the commodification of women in an Eastern context and it made him very successful. In the early 1880s, he was the highest-priced living artist and his works were praised by John Ruskin for harmoniously fusing art and archaeology, which skill lent them an air of authenticity.

Figure 1:4 reproduces Longsdon Long's *An Egyptian Girl with a Sistrum* (1886), inspired by an extensive tour of Egypt and frequent visits to the British Museum. The painting shows a scantily clad young female loosely holding the instrument sacred to the goddess, Isis. James Blades, in *Percussion Instruments and their History* notes that the sistrum is 'reported as an accompaniment to rites of wanton and lascivious character', and Marsh describes such rites in *The Beetle*.<sup>162</sup> Longsdon Long's girl is semi-reclining against a pillar and half smiling in invitation, a cross between what Bram Dijkstra in *Idols of Perversity* might term a 'collapsing nymph' and a siren.<sup>163</sup> In the image, her hands form a downward pointing triangle indicating the position of her genitalia beneath the folds of her garment, and this posture may signify sexual availability.<sup>164</sup> The background is vertically divided. On one side is engraved stonework depicting musical performance. On the other, behind her slumped shoulder, is a dark-leaved plant with three flowers in various stages of maturity. The floriographic intention may be to prefigure the girl's fate. I analogise it to that of Marsh's Egyptian: as a Cairene girl she is a soft bud; as the 'Woman of the Songs' she is a full bloom with a dangerous heady aroma; and as the Beetle she is a spent and hardened husk. The botanical terminology is even incorporated into Marsh's text

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<sup>161</sup> Displayed in the Picture Gallery, Royal Holloway, Egham at the time of writing.

<sup>162</sup> James Blades, *Percussion Instruments and their History* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1970), pp. 62-164 (p. 162).

<sup>163</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986).

<sup>164</sup> See Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996).

when Lessingham expresses fear that after Marjorie's abduction and presumed sexual abuse all that will remain of her will be a 'mere soiled husk'.<sup>165</sup>

When young Lessingham ventures out into the labyrinthine streets of Cairo, he hears 'a girl's voice,—full, and round and sweet', and these are adjectives suggestive of his hopes for her body and breasts.<sup>166</sup> He pulls aside a lattice blind and peers voyeuristically into the private and sacred space within and perhaps sees something like Long's painting. From that time onwards he conceives of the Egyptian as no longer a girl, but as the '*Woman of the Songs*' [my emphasis].<sup>167</sup> He anticipates intimate knowledge of her, a hedonistic experience of which he partakes voluntarily at first but comes to dread his subjection to it. She is a flower with a horrid insect concealed within the petals which holds no appeal. Lessingham, the coloniser, surrenders himself temporarily to become the object of the colonised. Subsequently, he reasserts dominance as he attempts to kill her. To Champnell, he presents his youth and her culpability as mitigation for his actions, but it makes no difference that he is a teenage traveller in Cairo and not a seasoned soldier. 'In the eyes of the colonised', says Albert Memmi in *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, 'all Europeans [...] are potential colonisers. All they have to do is set foot in the colonised's land'.<sup>168</sup> Lessingham's mere presence in Egypt can never be considered wholly innocent. The very fact of his being there is a manifestation of imperial power and of its violence.

Said's *Orientalism* identifies a late-Victorian association of the East with degeneracy and tantalising sexual exoticism shot through with perversion that simultaneously attracts and repels.<sup>169</sup> Lessingham feels initial attraction towards the Egyptian woman, but then repulsion at the mere contact of her lips, prompting him to dehumanise her and legitimise his act of violence against her. 'There was about her something so unnatural, so inhuman, that I believe even then I could have destroyed

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<sup>165</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 268.

<sup>166</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 208-09.

<sup>167</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 211.

<sup>168</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (Souvenir Press, 1974), p. 130.

<sup>169</sup> Said, *Orientalism* pp. 118-207.

her with as little sense of moral turpitude as if she had been some noxious insect'.<sup>170</sup> Hollingsworth notes use of the 'instrumental insect metaphor [...] justifying the use of otherwise immoral force against other human beings'.<sup>171</sup> Spivak expresses the same view in 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', commenting that the function of Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre* 'is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law'.<sup>172</sup> As Shildrick puts it, 'what is at stake in a politics of identity and difference [is] who is due moral consideration and who is not.'<sup>173</sup>

If the Egyptian woman is insectile, she is a lower life-form not meriting the usual protections of civilised society, undeserving of 'moral considerability', which Matthew Calarco defines as 'the criterion that establishes the necessary and sufficient conditions that must be met for an entity to be considered worthy of practical respect'.<sup>174</sup> Derrida describes a perpetrator's view of the fate of nonhuman animals or animalised humans as a 'noncriminal putting to death of the animal', which is precisely how Lessingham explains away his actions.<sup>175</sup> By metaphorising a woman as a 'noxious insect', he exonerates himself. According to his logic it is not immoral to kill a monster. In the context of genocide, Hollingsworth — not citing Marsh, but using the same terminology — discusses the symbolisation of 'noxious insect' as indicative of 'alterity, powerlessness and worthlessness', and goes on to say '[t]he metaphor also functions as a dramatic syllogism whose proper conclusion is the application of necessary force against a physically insignificant and verminous pest.'<sup>176</sup> When Lessingham recounts his use of 'necessary force', he claims among other mitigating factors drug-induced disorientation, imprisonment and witnessing of orgies and

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<sup>170</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 211.

<sup>171</sup> Hollingsworth, 'Entomological Other', p. 265.

<sup>172</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, "Race" Writing and Difference, 12.1 (1985), 243-261 (p. 247).

<sup>173</sup> Shildrick, p. 5.

<sup>174</sup> Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), p. 70.

<sup>175</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Eating Well, or the Calculation of the Subject', in *Points: Interviews 1974-1994*, ed. by Elizabeth Weber, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 278.

<sup>176</sup> Hollingsworth, 'Entomological Other', p. 266.

human sacrifice. For the act of strangulation of the Woman of the Songs, he expresses no remorse:

the accumulating rage which had been smouldering in my breast through all those leaden torturing hours, sprang into flame. Leaping off my couch of rugs, I flung my hands about her throat [...] I compressed her throat with my two hands as with an iron vice [...]

Tighter and tighter the pressure grew,—I did not stay to think if I was killing her—till on a sudden [...]

On a sudden, I felt her slipping from beneath my fingers. Without the slightest warning, in an instant she had vanished, and where, not a moment before, she herself had been, I found myself confronting a monstrous beetle, —a huge writhing creation of some wild nightmare.<sup>177</sup>

The Beetle is the manifestation of Lessingham's colonial transgression, his physical aggression, and his unacknowledged guilt. The 'noxious insect' that comes to occupy London, the priestess of Isis re-born on the point of death, is a creature who originates from the Englishman's act of violence against her in Cairo. It is the man who makes the monster.

Rhys Garnett comments in his essay '*Dracula and The Beetle*' that 'Marsh's protagonist [i.e. the Beetle] reveals the guilty fear of an imperialist class that its greedy expropriation of alien territories may *deserve* punishment [original emphasis]'.<sup>178</sup> It is the Beetle's mission to punish Lessingham, the statesman member of the imperialist class, penned by an author who aligned himself with the opposite end of the political spectrum. Aickman recounts how: '[Harry Heldmann] stood twice, unsuccessfully, for Parliament as a Liberal. (His brother, Richard Marsh, was a Conservative, and there are records of a frightening fight in the Drawing Room about Free Trade)'.<sup>179</sup> Marsh does not paint Lessingham as admirable, and The Beetle is only able to make the

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<sup>177</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 215.

<sup>178</sup> Rhys Garnett, '*Dracula and The Beetle: Imperial and Sexual Guilt and Fear in Late Victorian Fantasy*', in *Science Fiction Roots and Branches: Contemporary Critical Approaches*, ed. by Rhys Garnett & R.J. Ellis (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1990), pp. 30-54. (p. 30).

<sup>179</sup> Aickman, p. 90.



politician into a haunted man because of his culpability for crimes in the country of another. Gauri Viswanathan perceives the entire novel to be centred on this 'memory of Colonial history, deliberately suppressed or made subordinate'.<sup>180</sup> Metamorphosing the Egyptian woman into a coleopterous monster comes about through Lessingham's fault and that of his society and at some level he must be aware of it. 'Deep within himself, the colonialist pleads guilty', declares Memmi.<sup>181</sup> The corollary of this is that the Egyptian woman made insect can begin to plead innocent.

This thesis' interpretation of Marsh's text is read against the grain of extant scholarly criticism, which ought not to detract from the fact that Marsh's 'noxious insect' from Cairo, whatever her actions, is a strangled subaltern. She shares this fate with the young burlesque dancer in *The Crime and the Criminal*, who likewise hopes her lover will make her his wife. Instead, he chokes her to death. There are startling similarities between the two 1897 Marsh novels unlikely to be coincidental. A parallel reading of the strangulation scene of *The Crime and the Criminal* alongside *The Beetle* may even indicate the author's revulsion of Lessingham's crime.

"Reggie, has your love for me all gone? Don't you love me still?"

"Oh, yes," I said, "I love you still?"

Then, putting my hands round her neck, I began to choke her. Hers was a slender neck, so that I was able to put my hands right round and get a good firm grip. I don't think that at first she realised what I was up to. She was thinking more of love than of death. At any rate she did not attempt to scream. She looked to me as if she was startled. [...] as I got a tighter and tighter hold, and felt her life slipping through my fingers, I began to feel the joy of killing, for the killing's sake.<sup>182</sup>

The above words are spoken by the killer Townsend himself, and the reader is forcibly reminded of the horrific nature of his crime in the coroner's report.

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<sup>180</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, 'Deception and Decryption: Richard Marsh, *The Beetle*', *Literature and Empire Lecture Series* (Columbia University and Central University of Kerala, December 2017) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oFh01GNfP4>> [accessed 26 June 2021].

<sup>181</sup> Memmi, p. 57.

<sup>182</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Crime and the Criminal* (London: Ward Lock & Co. 1897), p. 63.

She had been killed by the pressure of a man's hands and fingers. Great violence must have been used. In fact, extraordinary violence. The skin of the throat was discoloured. Marks of a man's hands were most distinct.<sup>183</sup>

Paul Lessingham is not a cold-blooded killer like Reggie Townsend. He is a hot-tempered one who wilfully took a life in common with the villain of the lesser-known text. In *The Beetle*, there are other threatened strangulations such as the Beetle attacking Holt, and Atherton being tempted to do violence to Lessingham: 'my hands itched to clutch him by the throat'.<sup>184</sup> But the one that comes closest is when Lessingham, 'transformed by rage', catches Atherton by the throat and nearly breaks his neck, a throttling he may only fail to carry through because Champnell is present.<sup>185</sup> Had his original crime in Egypt happened in England, he would almost certainly have been hanged, a fact re-iterated within the novel: 'the Englishman's law is no respecter of persons. Show him to be guilty, and it would hang Paul Lessingham'.<sup>186</sup>

Townsend turns his victim into an 'ugly heap', stripping her of all identifying markers so her corpse cannot speak of who she is.<sup>187</sup> Lessingham robs the Woman of the Songs of her voice, dehumanising her so she has no narrative in her own text. Her only defence against her assailant is to call upon her metamorphic power and take on the body of a monstrous scarab, the epitome of her country's ancient religious belief in reincarnation. To become an emblematic insect need not utterly obliterate her human origins, especially for a twenty-first century reader better placed to witness her as William Hughes puts it: 'through the filter of a conscious, and occasionally apologetic, present'.<sup>188</sup> The words of Elleke Boehmer are applicable to the Beetle,

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<sup>183</sup> Marsh, *Crime*, p. 171.

<sup>184</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 54, 127, 145.

<sup>185</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 224.

<sup>186</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 113.

<sup>187</sup> Marsh, *Crime*, p. 64.

<sup>188</sup> William Hughes, 'A singular Invasion: Revisiting the Postcoloniality of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 88-102 (p. 89).

who occupies: 'what has been called "the space of the adversarial"—the power of extreme difference to disturb, distort, or overwhelm dominant representations [and this is] expressed even within the most conventional of colonialist texts'.<sup>189</sup> Marsh's novel is often included in the category of 'colonialist texts', even taking into account his non Anglo-Saxon voice and marginal position identified by Höglund. The significance of *The Beetle* is that Marsh also attributes to the Eastern Woman, strength of purpose, ingenuity, and resilience.

Cohen closes 'Monster Culture' with 'The Monster Stands at the Threshold ... of Becoming', in which monsters question why they have been created and misrepresented, requesting that cultural assumptions which brought them into being be re-evaluated.<sup>190</sup> Re-evaluation of *The Beetle* through Postcolonial Theory begins to redress the balance between white and yellow, European and Egyptian, human and monstrous insect. Reginia Gagnier comments how in the 1880s and 1890s, the Egyptian New Woman was beginning to emerge out of the literary circles of Cairo to assert her gender in cultural and religious arenas, a campaign which only abated during the first half of the twentieth century so she could prioritise participation in rising Arab nationalism and refuse imperialist domination.<sup>191</sup> When *The Beetle* was first published in 1897, Huuda Shaarawi (1879-1947), an eighteen-year-old Egyptian, was just finding her voice as an activist and leader of feminist thought and would go on to organise an anti-British demonstration in 1919.<sup>192</sup> Shaarawi's objective was to show solidarity between Muslim women of colour and to protest against exploitative colonial rule. Being neither fictional nor supernatural, for Shaarawi, there was no transmogrification into a scarab. Her independence came with a throwing off of the

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<sup>189</sup> Boehmer, p. 21.

<sup>190</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 20.

<sup>191</sup> Reginia Gagnier, 'Global circulation and the Long Nineteenth Century', keynote speech, Nineteenth-Century Studies Graduate Conference, Queen Mary's London, London 19 January 2019.

<sup>192</sup> Rula B. Quawas, ' "A Sea Captain in Her Own Right": Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaaraawi', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8.1 (2006), 219-35. 1919 was the same year the adaptation of Marsh's novel hit the silver screen.

veil in 1922, and foundation of the first Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923.<sup>193</sup> Had the Woman of the Songs never been assaulted by Lessingham or felt compelled to pursue him to England she could have benefited from Shaarawi's pioneering work. As it is, having been betrayed by a privileged white man who makes her monstrous, she suffers the loss of her voice, her face, her species and possibly even her soul.



Figure I:5

John Singer Sargent,

*Egyptian Woman* (1890-1891)

Oil on Canvas, 64.8cm x 53.3cm

Metropolitan Museum of Art (US), New York

In the 1890s John Singer Sargent (1856-1912) probably the most celebrated portrait painter of his generation, painted Arab women on several occasions, and in *Egyptian Woman* (1890-1891) in Figure I:5, he presents someone with a calm expression framed by a hijab against a background darkened and rough.<sup>194</sup> Her religion is clear from her dress, and her complexion and features point to a non-European ethnicity. She presents an alternative face of the Beetle, steadily meeting the eyes of the unprejudiced observer. In such an image, 'The Monster Stands at the Threshold ... of Becoming [... Human]'.<sup>195</sup> She is redeemed, reintegrated into our kinship group, and as such elicits sympathy in a way the 'noxious insect' is constructed not to.

<sup>193</sup> Sania Shaarawi Llanfranchi, *Casting off the Veil: The Life of Huda Shaarawi, Egypt's First Feminist* (I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012).

<sup>194</sup> John Singer Sargent's *Egyptian Woman* exposes her face. Orientalist painter, Frederick Goodall's *An Egyptian Beauty* (1870) depicts a woman with niqab leaving only her eyes visible.

<sup>195</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 20.

Immediately after publication of Marsh's novel, the reviewer of *The Globe* complains of *The Beetle*: 'The Cockroach or the Martian would seem a better alternative title'.<sup>196</sup> This comment reveals a failure to recognise three key points: entomologically a cockroach does not experience complete metamorphosis as does a beetle; a cockroach is an insect tending to congregate in vast numbers rather than singly as does a dung beetle; a cockroach does not hold the same archaeo-theological association as does a scarab. The suggestion Marsh's 'Martian' emanates from another planet is further evidence the *Globe* reviewer misses the point that the *Beetle* is very much terrestrial and moreover connected to a specific geographical location on earth, unless he is conflating the *Beetle* with the insectoids of H. G. Wells's *The Crystal Egg* (1897) or making a pun on Marsh's name.

What is disappointing is the lack of attention to Marsh's insect imagery, which is extremely intelligent zoologically and in being aligned with the beliefs of the old polytheistic religion of Egypt. Even when decrying sordidness and vulgarity in the novel, the reviewer of *The Daily Mail* at least recognises the *Beetle* as a 'very objectionable scarabaeous'.<sup>197</sup> The reviewer of *Academy* comes closer to appreciating the associations of the 'scarabaeous sacer' in the 'ingenious book of horrors', and *St James's Budget* is clear: 'The *Beetle* is not of the common kitchen type, but a scarabaeous of ancient lineage'.<sup>198</sup> Marsh applies to a colonised subject the language of degradation and precise animal symbolism. No other incarnation of the Egyptian woman apart from as a scarab could be so appropriate or so multilayered. No creature other than the insect emblem of filth and of renaissance could be so sympathetic to his plot or to the woman's untold story.

This chapter has positioned the *Beetle* as a coleopterous monster and subaltern scarab and avoided an overly simplistic categorisation of the monster as

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<sup>196</sup> Anon, 'By the Way', *Globe*, 30 October 1897, p. 32.

<sup>197</sup> Anon, 'The World of Books', *Daily Mail*, 17 October 1897, p. 3.

<sup>198</sup> Anon, 'Reviews', *Academy*, 30 October 1897, pp.98-99; Anon, 'Literature and Dogma', *St. James's Budget*, 21 January 1898, p. 22.

undeserving of sympathy and the subaltern too silent to demand it. Sympathy, if generated at all, is linked to the perceived degree of vulnerability and morality in either embodiment, and assessment of these qualities is not straightforward. Interrogating *The Beetle* through the author's biography, Monster Theory, and Postcolonialism, and combining these methodological approaches with overarching cultural historicism, has begun the sequence of building an impression of the entomological subject at the heart of the novel. Having established the Beetle's identification as Egyptian is key both for the insect and the human, the following chapter considers her as a Priestess of Isis possessing the skills of a physician and with an insect identity influenced by the iconography of her ancient religion. The lens is mythological and medical and there is a subtle shift away from Imperial Gothic or Racial Gothic to *fin-de-siècle* Egyptian Gothic.

## Chapter Two

### Egyptology, Egyptomania and Egyptian Gothic

The previous chapter concluded with the Beetle on the threshold of becoming human, and this chapter presents her becoming humane. There is no implication the Beetle develops sentimental attachments for others. My proposition is that she comprehends suffering analytically rather than emotionally, dispenses vital care and alleviates ailments. Usually, but not exclusively, she has her own interests in mind. In line with Darwin's argument in *The Descent of Man*, this does not preclude consideration of her actions as sympathetic. Not only monstrous but medical, the Beetle can partly be understood as a physician. She is a physician who heals herself from death by becoming insect, and a physician who also heals others. Her having been a Priestess of Isis with consequent access to magical and medicinal knowledge supports this interpretation, and evidence is drawn from ancient papyri known in the late-nineteenth century. For comparison Marsh's text is then situated within the subgenre of *fin-de-siècle* Egyptian Gothic to be read against companion pieces reliant on the same mythology and filtered by contemporaneous sociopolitical events. The express intention in the second section is to measure how much the death-defying Beetle emerges as more sympathetic or less so than her counterparts.

### The Egyptian Physician

Ancient Egyptian religious officials were familiar with human anatomy, its inner workings, and its outward symptoms of distress. Such knowledge was acquired through ritualistic involvement with evisceration and embalming and applied to the treatment of live subjects. That these practices took place in ancient times was not mere conjecture at the *fin de siècle*. It was evident in medical texts thousands of years

old that came to western attention in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most significant were the *Edwin Smith Papyrus* and the *Ebers Papyrus*.<sup>1</sup>

In 1862 in Luxor, American Egyptologist, Edwin Smith, purchased one of the very oldest scientific treatises on surgery and the treatment of injuries. The *Edwin Smith Papyrus* documents trauma cases from initial examination through diagnosis and treatment right up to follow-up care, based on what James Allen, curator of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's Egyptian Department, describes as 'knowledge gained from practical experience.'<sup>2</sup> It starts with the head and travels down the body. *Gray's Anatomy* (1858), currently in its 42<sup>nd</sup> edition, uses the same structure, although the papyrus only came to light in London four years after the first publication of the medical reference book and so could not have influenced it.<sup>3</sup> The *Edwin Smith Papyrus* dates back to at least 1500 BCE and its inclusion of archaic terminology and grammar indicates it might even be a transcription of a very ancient text from the time of Imhotep around 2630 BCE.<sup>4</sup>

Imhotep was the most important official of Pharaoh Djoser who reigned from 2630 until 2611 BCE. Among the extensive list of important positions he held was that of High Priest of the sun god Ra at Heliopolis, considered to be the original site of the colossal granite scarab discussed in my introduction.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, Imhotep was a physician.<sup>6</sup> As High Priest he had access to the inner workings of dead bodies as their organs were removed at mummification, and as onsite architect and civil engineer of

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<sup>1</sup> The *Kahun Papyrus* discovered by Flinders Petrie in 1889 was concerned solely with gynaecological issues and not translated into English until 1898 and so, despite being the oldest known medical text of Ancient Egypt, it does not form part of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> James P Allen, *Ancient Medicine in Ancient Egypt* (New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY: Yale UP, 2006), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Gray, *Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical* (London: John W Parker and Son, 1858).

<sup>4</sup> See James Henry Breasted, *The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus* [1930] (Chicago: University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> An archival record of Imhotep's official positions is carved into the base of a statue of Djoser discovered at an archaeological dig at Saqqara in 1926 and translated by Cecil Firth, the then Inspector of Antiquities.

<sup>6</sup> 'Imhotep', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt: G-O*, ed. by Donald B Redford (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).



the Step Pyramid at the Saqqara necropolis, he had access to the live bodies of the pyramid's construction workers.

The existence of skilled medical practices among the Ancient Egyptians is more recently supported by the 1996 discovery of distinguished archaeologist and former Egyptian Minister of State for Antiquities Affairs, Zahi Hawass. He uncovered: skeletons with broken bones which had been set in splints and mended; skeletons revealing owners who had survived surgical amputations; and even a skull showing evidence of brain surgery to relieve pressure from a tumour.<sup>7</sup> Hawass's dig was at Giza, and the unearthed skeletons are thought to date back to at least one hundred years after the construction of the Step Pyramid. Imhotep could not himself have acted as physician on this site at that time, but his knowledge might have been passed down to others. In a nice coming together of entomological and archaeological trivia, the hieroglyphic sign for 'bee' occurs in Imhotep's name, and the *Edwin Smith Papyrus* reveals Ancient Egyptian knowledge of the antibacterial properties of honey when applied to wounds.

After his death, Imhotep was deified as the Egyptian god of medicine and revered throughout the ancient world by Egyptians, Romans and Greeks. According to *The Oxford Companion to Medicine*, he later came to be identified with the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius, and predated Hippocrates, the so-called father of modern medicine, by two thousand years.<sup>8</sup> The nineteenth-century view of Imhotep is revealed in a comment made in 1892 by Sir William Osler, the highly respected author of *The Principles and Practise of Medicine*.<sup>9</sup> Osler is cited as saying Imhotep was 'the first figure of a physician to stand out clearly from the mists of antiquity'.<sup>10</sup> A mere

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<sup>7</sup> *The Lost Mummy of Imhotep*, dir. by Gary Glassman (Discovery Channel: Discovery Communications Inc, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Lock, John M. Last, George Dunea, *The Oxford Companion to Medicine*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Osler was made Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1884, Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 1898, and Regius Chair of Medicine at Oxford in 1904.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in 'Imhotep: Egyptian Architect, Physician, and Statesman' *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Imhotep>> [accessed 24 June 2021].

five years after this statement, Marsh creates an Egyptian physician in the shape of the Beetle.

Along with the *Edwin Smith Papyrus*, the second, significant, Ancient Egyptian medical treatise recovered in the nineteenth century is the *Ebers Papyrus* purchased in Luxor at the turn of the year 1873-1874 by Georg Ebers, Professor of Egyptian Languages and Antiquities at Leipzig.<sup>11</sup> The sixty-foot scroll written in cursive hieratic script and translated into English in 1890 contains hundreds of magical formulae and herbal remedies for a range of intestinal, dental, visual, and dermatological diseases as well as a small treatise on the heart, and cures for respiratory problems and a plethora of other physiological complaints.<sup>12</sup> What the *Edwin Smith Papyrus* and the *Ebers Papyrus* demonstrate, along with the acknowledgement of Imhotep's status as a physician, is that late Victorians were exposed to the existence of Ancient Egyptian medical skills and their entanglement of rational science with supernatural magico-religious methods.

Popular novelists such as Richard Marsh and his contemporary, Guy Boothby, could and did utilise this awareness. Boothby created Phatmes otherwise known as Pharos the Egyptian, a person so medically advanced he manufactures a deadly plague to decimate his enemies.<sup>13</sup> Marsh created the Beetle with more modest skills, not directed to such nefarious ends, or at least not such widespread ones. Allen notes how the practical remedies of the *Edwin Smith Papyrus* work alongside spells or invocations referred to as 'sympathetic magic' and used to deflect malign forces.<sup>14</sup> Marsh's Beetle calls on the opposite of sympathetic magic. The utterance of her name is an antipathetic magic summoning malign forces with the intention of weakening

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<sup>11</sup> Hugh Chisholm, ed., 'Ebers, Georg Moritz', in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (32 vols) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1911), VIII, pp. 841-42.

<sup>12</sup> Paula Veiga, *Health and Medicine in Ancient Egypt: Magic and Science* <[https://www.academia.edu/225468/Health\\_and\\_Medicine\\_in\\_Ancient\\_Egypt\\_Magic\\_and\\_Science](https://www.academia.edu/225468/Health_and_Medicine_in_Ancient_Egypt_Magic_and_Science)> [accessed 27 June 2021]; Allen, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Guy Newell Boothby, *Pharos the Egyptian* (London: Ward, Locke & Co. Ltd., 1899).

<sup>14</sup> Allen, p. 10.

and controlling others. It is an aspect of her medical skill that complicates my positioning of her as dispenser of beneficial remedies on other occasions.

The first person to encounter the Egyptian Beetle is Robert Holt, the exhausted, unemployed clerk, and narrator of Book I who is subjected to the nauseating experience of the giant scarab crawling up his body and even inserting part of itself into his mouth. I propose a reading of this event as a clinical assessment.

It pressed lightly against my clothing with what might, for all the world, have been spider's legs. [...] They embraced me softly, stickily, as if the creature glued and unglued them, each time it moved.

[...] the impression grew upon me that it was some member of the spider family, some monstrous member, of the like of which I had never heard or read. It was heavy, so heavy indeed, that I wondered how, with so slight a pressure, it managed to retain its hold,—that it did so by the aid of some adhesive substance at the end of its legs I was sure,—I could feel it stick. Its weight increased as it ascended,—and it smelt! I had been for some time aware that it emitted an unpleasant, foetid odour; as it neared my face it became so intense as to be unbearable.

It was at my chest. I became more and more conscious of an uncomfortable wobbling motion, as if each time it breathed its body heaved. Its forelegs touched the bare skin about the base of my neck; they stuck to it,—shall I ever forget the feeling? I have it often in my dreams. While it hung on with those in front it seemed to draw its other legs up after it. It crawled up my neck, with hideous slowness, a quarter of an inch at a time, its weight compelling me to brace the muscles of my back. It reached my chin, it touched my lips,— and I stood still and bore it all, while it enveloped my face with its huge, slimy, evil-smelling body, and embraced me with its myriad legs. The horror of it made me mad. I shook myself like one stricken with the shaking ague.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 16-17.

There are strong connotations of sexual assault as has been commented upon by Julian Wolfreys and Minna Vuohelainen.<sup>16</sup> Patrick Brantlinger observes of the Beetle: 'when it assaults its victims, both female and male, in its scarab form, the attacks seem to be some sort of horrific rape.'<sup>17</sup> Victoria Margree describes the early chapters of the novel as 'forming an extended homoerotic and masochistic fantasy', an opinion based in part on the Beetle commanding the stunned man in Book I to divest himself of his 'sodden shabby clothes' and then apparently leering at his nakedness.<sup>18</sup> Critics are largely united in interpreting the insect's intimate examination in this way, however a counter reading is also possible, and it is one which has rarely if ever been put forward.<sup>19</sup> I suggest the Beetle is carrying out what amounts to a medical assessment of a man on the verge of collapse, and subsequently administers treatment to him with some success. Armed with the knowledge of the Ancient Egyptian Priesthood, The Beetle is playing the role not of sexual predator, but of physician.

The Beetle makes an objective, clinical assessment of Holt's symptoms and treats them. The Beetle does not make him ill. The Beetle in a limited sense makes him slightly better. Even before Holt comes into contact with the insectoid Egyptian, he is starving and very unwell. He summarises the extent of his sorry state. 'My scanty clothing was soaked; I was wet to the skin! I was shivering. And, each second, it seemed to rain still faster. My teeth were chattering. The damp was liquefying the

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<sup>16</sup> Julian Wolfreys, 'Introduction', in Richard Marsh, *The Beetle* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 9-34; Minna Vuohelainen, 'Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897): a late-Victorian popular novel', *Working with English*, 2.1 (2006), 89-100; Vuohelainen, ' "You Know Not of What You Speak": Language, Identity and Xenophobia [...]' p. 325.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic', in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012), pp. 202-21 (p. 203).

<sup>18</sup> Victoria Margee, ' "Both in Men's Clothing": Gender, Sovereignty and Insecurity in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', *Critical Survey*, 19.2 (2007), 63-81 (p. 68); Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> For another critical reading as sexual assault, see Shuhita Bhattacharjee, ' "Not a muscle at my command": Mesmeric Trance, Consent, and #MeToo in Richard Marsh', *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, 16.2 (2020) <<http://ncgsjournal.com/issue162/bhattacharjee.html>> [accessed 21 September 2021].

very marrow in my bones'.<sup>20</sup> In his own words, he is 'exhausted by hunger and fatigue'.<sup>21</sup> His being drenched and destitute is not caused by any agency of the Beetle, and this is remarked upon by Wolfreys in 'The Hieroglyphic Other', who blames society and the city, and not the scarab, for Holt's poor condition.<sup>22</sup> His symptoms are the result of economic misfortune which sees him without shelter or food, denied entry even by the dosshouse, and condemned to tramp the wet streets on an empty belly. There is no suggestion the Beetle has caused him to lose his job, nor that she has engineered a filling-up of all the available places in the casual ward so he has nowhere to sleep, nor that she has caused his entreaties for food to go unanswered. It is certainly never implied that with whatever supernatural powers she possesses she has any control over the natural elements and caused clouds to rain down on him. The factors contributing to Holt's poor physical and mental condition are lack of funds, bad luck, and bad weather. Not one is influenced by the Beetle.

The partially open window of the house in which the Beetle has taken up residence could be read as intended to be a lure to passing prey, but this is behaviour more likely to be exhibited by a spider than a dung beetle. The raising of the lower sash could equally be to allow a little air into the warm room since the Beetle in human form does not appear to be in the best of health. She may even perceive an affinity between herself and the sick man. For her own ailments she has prescribed bed rest, which explains why when Holt enters like a thief in the night, she is lying immobile in pitch darkness, metaphorically cocooned by the bedclothes. What causes her to emerge from this chrysalis is the need to carry out a physical examination of the intruder she identifies as requiring medical intervention. Why she does so as an insect instead of as a human may be the differing abilities of those species.

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<sup>20</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 12. Marsh may be implying Holt is tubercular. Ironically, contemporary medical advice would have been to winter in Egypt as recommended in George Moore, *Esther Waters* (London: Walter Scott Ltd, 1894).

<sup>21</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Julian Wolfreys, 'The Hieroglyphic Other: *The Beetle*, London and the Anxieties of Late Imperial England', in *Writing London: Inventions of the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 8-36.

Marsh's novel falls primarily into the Gothic genre, but it does not preclude elements of entomological realism. Similarities between Atherton's description of the Beetle manifesting as a scarab, which I shall discuss at length in my third chapter, and Louis Figuier's popular *The Insect World* indicate it (or something like it) may have been a source text.<sup>23</sup> Insects have highly sensitive chemoreceptors or olfactory sensilla located in their antennae, the body parts equipped to detect chemical stimuli in their environment. As a survival mechanism, antennae help them identify whether something is likely to constitute a source of nourishment, predator or prospective breeding partner.<sup>24</sup> Should the Beetle not retain any human consciousness and behave in a purely instinctive manner as she crawls up Holt, she may simply be verifying if he is food, threat, or mate. The proposition put forward by most others is the insect concludes the man is a mate and effectively rapes him. While it is a theory marvellously horrific, in the natural historical realms it is not entomologically viable, and it is partly on those grounds I dispute it. Holt is not a fellow coleopteran, so he is unfit for the Beetle's procreative purposes when manifested as insect. He would smell and taste all wrong to a creature driven by natural instincts. I make no exaggerated claim Marsh writes as an expert entomologist, what I do suggest is that the ostensible sex act is not just grotesque, it is a supernatural stretch too far. Gothic may be a genre characterised by transgression of boundaries, however the coleopterous monster of prohibition polices 'the borders that cannot — *must not* — be crossed'.<sup>25</sup>

The Beetle's relatively harmless incursion into Holt's personal space is further indicated by her insect species. She is of the superfamily *Scarabaeinae*, whose habit of laying eggs in balls of dung was widely known due to the publications of entomologists and naturalists such as Figuier and Jean-Henri Fabre or popular writers

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<sup>23</sup> Louis Figuier, *The Insect World* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1872), p. 435. Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 117.

<sup>24</sup> R. F. Chapman, 'Chemoreception', in *The Insects: Structure and Function* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 13.

such as Acheta Domestica or John George Wood.<sup>26</sup> It cannot be proven Marsh was familiar with Fabre's work initially available only in French, though Darwin, a fluent French speaker certainly was.<sup>27</sup> Gillian Beer in *Darwin's Plots* makes the point that in the late-Victorian era, widespread absorption of scientific knowledge was not predicated on a need for non-specialists to have direct exposure to the scientific works themselves.

Everyone found themselves living in a Darwinian world [...] So the question of who read Darwin, or whether a writer had read Darwin, becomes only a fraction of the answer. The related question of whether the reader had read Darwin turns out also to have softer edges than might at first appear.<sup>28</sup>

At the time Marsh was writing *The Beetle*, scientific knowledge had become disseminated into general knowledge and there is no reason to suppose this would have been limited to Darwin's works alone or that the basics of entomology would have escaped wider dissemination.

Late nineteenth-century specialist information on insects was supplemented by the dynamic displays of Kensington's Natural History Museum, which from 1895 had a dedicated entomology department.<sup>29</sup> According to Syperek, what was significant about these 'world class' displays was that they exhibited 'insect's physiological processes and interactions with their environment'.<sup>30</sup> Evolutionary biologist, Stephen Gould makes the link between such displays and imperialism. 'The Victorians [...] viewed their museums as microcosms for national goals of territorial expansion and faith in progress'.<sup>31</sup> Marsh need not have been an entomologist to have known a reasonable amount about beetles. He could simply have visited the

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<sup>26</sup> See Jean-Henri Fabre, *Souvenirs Entomologiques (Insect Recollections)* (Paris: Librairie CH. Delagrave, 1879). By 1897 it was in its fifth series.

<sup>27</sup> Fabre's early work is cited by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*, for example pp. 218-19, 364.

<sup>28</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Chas O. Waterhouse, *Guide to the Exhibited Series of Insects* (London: British Museum, 1908).

<sup>30</sup> Syperek, 'Gendered Metamorphoses', p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, 'Cabinet Museums: Alive, Alive, O!', in *Dinosaur in a Haystack: Reflections on Natural History* (New York: Harmony Books, 1995), pp. 238-47 (p. 243).

Natural History Museum to access the information, just as he could simply have visited the British Museum to behold a statue of a huge scarab. He need not have read specialist publications or scientific documents to have stumbled upon details of insect life cycles since publications such as the *Strand* included articles on Natural History, and the *Strand* was very widely read. John Sutherland comments in his introduction to Boothby's *A Bid for Fortune* that at its zenith the *Strand's* sales were 'phenomenal, reaching over half a million a month'.<sup>32</sup> In late 1896 this richly illustrated magazine to which Marsh regularly contributed, and to which he granted a rare, if not unique interview, even featured a six-page spread on insects accompanied by multiple magnified images of them.<sup>33</sup>

The insect about which Marsh chose to write was a dung beetle, born and living in mud and excrement. It is a species far less gruesome than the *Silphidae* beetle which feeds on decaying organic matter including mammalian flesh, and far less destructive than the crop-devastating Colorado Beetle, about which existed a plethora of warnings, prompting the passing of the Destructive Insects Act (1877).<sup>34</sup> The dung beetle is not so much noxious as innocuous, and this causes a degree of tension between her innate insect characteristics and her monster characterisation. Clark comments in *Bugs and the Victorians* that ordinarily insects tended to be viewed negatively. 'Within medical literature and travel narratives, insects were long associated with filth, decay and putrefaction, and with the amorphous concepts of contagion, miasma, and animacular disease agents.'<sup>35</sup> Marsh exploits associations and 'amorphous concepts' of insects in general, while simultaneously subverting them in his choice of insect in particular. His multi-valenced text selects an insect with benign

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<sup>32</sup> John Sutherland, 'Introduction' in Guy Boothby, *A Bid for Fortune; or, Dr Nikola's Vendetta* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), p. xiv.

<sup>33</sup> William G. Fitzgerald, 'Some Wonders of the Microscope', *Strand Magazine*, 12 (1896), 210-216. By 1909 the *Strand* was carrying an illustrated five-page spread speculating on the effect of magnified insects in the metropolis. J. H. Kerner Greenwood, 'If Insects were Bigger', *Strand Magazine* 12 (1909), 700-705.

<sup>34</sup> Clark, 'The Colorado Beetle', in *Bugs*, pp. 132-53.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, p. 196.



inflections. Associated agriculturally with the breaking down of manure, the dung beetle is indispensable to maintaining an ecological balance. Entomologically speaking, the species of the Beetle depicted by Marsh is not so much antagonistic to human life as even sympathetic to it, and this problematises a reading of the creature as purely horrific.

The preceding paragraphs consider the Beetle in a mono-species state, however Marsh's creation is a creature of duality alternating between coleopterous and homo sapiens existences. It is debatable how much of the one remains within the other when she switches bodily form. Undeniably the Beetle is a shapeshifter. Possibly she is a hybrid too. If an unquantifiable element of human consciousness remains when the Egyptian manifests as a scarab, then the motivations of this hybrid entity will differ from the purely instinctive behaviour of a normal insect. Her approach towards Holt and ascension of his body could be undertaken as part of a medical examination that is intelligent as well as instinctive. Heart palpitations can be felt through the man's clothing, but the Beetle needs to come into direct contact with exposed skin to check for symptoms of fever or hypothermia. Her feelers touching the sick man's lips may indicate she is measuring his internal body temperature or checking for starvation-induced ketosis, a condition in which the blood glucose level is too low, treatable through the ingestion of carbohydrates.<sup>36</sup>

When she resumes human form and questions the reluctant patient, the 'man' in the bed may be seeking to confirm the findings of the initial examination carried out by her scarab self. Following this interrogation, the physician recommends several courses of action. To combat the risk of hypothermia, she commands Holt to undress and put on a cloak instead of his wet and chilly gear. To stave off starvation, she provides bread, meat and wine which Holt devours animalistically 'like some famished

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<sup>36</sup> D. H. Williamson, 'Ketosis' in *Encyclopaedia of Human Nutrition*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (2013), cited in sciencedirect.com <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/ketone-bodies>> [accessed 24 June 2021].

wolf'.<sup>37</sup> The Beetle ministers to the man, and, while she may strategically think he will prove useful as a minion in future, in that immediate present she observes his suffering, ameliorates it, and saves his life. Her prognosis echoes Khepri in *The Book of the Dead*: 'For you there is the return to life, the coming out of death, you shall live on! - for me! - Live on!'<sup>38</sup>

Further evidence of the Beetle's medical expertise comes later in the novel when she performs what amounts to cardiopulmonary resuscitation on the rather pathetic figure of Percy Woodville, whose heart arrests after having inadvertently inhaled poison gas, the chemical weapon Sydney Atherton has been developing to wipe out enemies on a frightening scale in what is effectively a militaristic application of a late nineteenth-century arsenical insecticide.<sup>39</sup> Atherton relishes his power, stimulated by the prospect of it elevating him above the local and personal to the global and god-like impersonal. 'What a sublime thought to think that in the hollow of your own hand lies the life and death of nations,—and it was almost in mine'.<sup>40</sup> From this lofty perspective, aliens are ripe for eradication, their deaths as inconsequential as if they were not human but insect.

Atherton's ruthlessness resembles two of Boothby's arch villains, Pharos the Egyptian, and Dr Nikola.<sup>41</sup> To Pharos, I shall return later in the chapter. Boothby became established as a popular author in 1895 with *A Bid for Fortune*, the first in his series of books concerning Dr Nikola, the foreign mind-controlling anti-hero and vivisectionist with a concealed laboratory in Port Said at the end of the Suez Canal.<sup>42</sup> Two years later, not hidden away in Egypt, but in a laboratory attached to his London home, Atherton tests the efficacy of his killer gas by experimenting on live animal

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<sup>37</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> For the development of chemical pest control, see Clark, *Bugs*.

<sup>40</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> Like Marsh, Boothby was a prolific writer from a not altogether British lineage, and like Marsh, he came from a family dogged by a scandalous history. I do not imply Marsh suggests Atherton indulges in Nikola's creation of human-animal hybrids.

<sup>42</sup> Guy Boothby, *A Bid for Fortune; or, Dr Nikola's Vendetta* (London: Ward Lock, and Bowden, 1895).

subjects caring nothing for their pain. He is a vivisectionist, and for some readers this would have placed him beyond the pale. Rob Boddice sets out in *The Science of Sympathy* how the late-Victorian vivisection debate in Britain was characterised by opinions that were entrenched and extreme.<sup>43</sup> Frances Power Cobbe founded the Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection in 1875 and comments in her autobiography how this was the year she fell out with Darwin.

This pleasant intercourse with an illustrious man [Darwin] was, like many other pleasant things, brought to a close for me in 1875 by the beginning of the Anti-Vivisection crusade. Mr Darwin eventually became the centre of an adoring clique of vivisectionists who (as his Biography shows) plied him incessantly to uphold their practice till the deplorable spectacle was exhibited of a man who would not allow a fly to bite a pony's neck, standing forth before all Europe [...] as the advocate of Vivisection.<sup>44</sup>

Opposition to vivisection tended to spring from a sentimental sympathy for animals often linked to their anthropomorphisation, whereas support for vivisection tended to be based on a kind of social sympathy for the pursuit of knowledge and a willingness to tolerate short-term pain or death in the lower species for the long-term gain of one's own kind. Atherton clearly subscribes to the latter view, killing to meet the demands of colonial expansion in which the enemy is assimilated to the animal or more precisely to the insect, leaving the way morally clear for experimentation and then eradication. It is, in the words of David Punter in *Gothic Pathologies*, 'one of the ways in which an imperial "logic" of extermination and genocide is preceded and accompanied at all points by a cultural logic — ultimately derived, if vicariously from Darwin'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rob Boddice, *The Science of Sympathy* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe, As Told By Herself* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1904), pp. 490-91. Cobbe founded the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection in 1898.

<sup>45</sup> David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), p. 146.

Atherton is secure in his right to power over life and death, and his phraseology borders on the facetious with his 'pouf!—in about the time it takes you to say, they would all be dead men'.<sup>46</sup> He performs vivisection on a cat without the use of anaesthetic, and proclaims with the flourish of a lethal magician: 'hey presto! the cat lies dead', flippantly conflating science and a conjuring trick.<sup>47</sup> Even H. G. Wells's loathsome scientist Griffin in *The Invisible Man* (1897) gives his feline subject food and eventually administers opium to it.<sup>48</sup> Not so Atherton, whose actions would have rendered him morally repugnant to many, and whose callousness is not limited to dumb beasts. 'Atherton's magic vapour', as he possessively likes to refer to his deadly invention, does not differentiate between friend or feline, class or race, national or geographic boundaries. It is an indiscriminate weapon of mass destruction in the hands of an irresponsible man. Discoverable in *The Beetle* is a criticism of imperial technocracy exemplified by the lethal activities within Atherton's laboratory. Authorial sympathy is unlikely to rest with Atherton, but elsewhere with the prospective victims of the noxious gas. Perhaps, briefly, it even rests with the 'noxious insect' who combats its deleterious effects on Atherton's friend when he suffers accidental exposure to it.

Atherton is affected by the potentially lethal accident and regains consciousness in the arms of the Beetle, who nurses him at a time when he is wholly vulnerable. He is a handsome man, and if the Beetle were the opportunistic rapist of Book I of which she is accused by Effinger and Brantlinger among others, it begs the question why in Book II she does not dominate him sexually when the chance presents itself.<sup>49</sup> The Beetle does not exploit the situation in this way because her focus is on saving and not on sexually assaulting. Her ministering to Holt is driven by the urge to parasitise him and use his body as a human machine to do her bidding, not to mate

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<sup>46</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 68.

<sup>47</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 103.

<sup>48</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd, 1897).

<sup>49</sup> Effinger, 'Insect Politics', pp. 251-68.

with him. Her motive with Atherton is fear of electricity or the desire to acquire knowledge of it. Both of those medical interventions are driven by a sympathy that is self-serving survival instinct, however, in the third case of Woodville, her actions appear to be altruistic.

Atherton is physically weak and painfully aware Woodville's life hangs in the balance, yet he is incapable of coming to his friend's aid.

His heart seemed still,—the vapour took effect directly on the cardiac centres. To revive their action that instantly, was indispensable. Yet my brain was in such a whirl that I could not even think of how to set about beginning. Had I been alone, it is more than probable Woodville would have died.<sup>50</sup>

The Beetle with her medical knowledge acts quickly, knowing exactly what to do. '[The Beetle] extended himself at full length upon his motionless form. Putting his lips to Percy's, he seemed to be pumping life from his own body into the unconscious man's'.<sup>51</sup> The Beetle's sex is misidentified by Atherton, perhaps influenced by the extreme scarcity of women doctors, and late-Victorian prejudice purportedly shared by the Queen against them practicing medicine.<sup>52</sup> In the Old Kingdom of Ancient Egypt, evidence exists of female doctors, with the earliest being Peseshet (c.2350-2320 BCE), supervisor of funerary priestesses. As an acolyte of Isis, the Beetle might well have been educated in life-saving cardio pulmonary resuscitation which she puts to good use. Atherton calls the Beetle an 'impromptu physician'.<sup>53</sup> I offer evidence she is likely to be a properly trained one.

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<sup>50</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 104.

<sup>51</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 104-05.

<sup>52</sup> The surgeon, Margaret Ann Bulkley a.k.a. James Barry (1789-1865) graduated in medicine from Edinburgh. Bulkley posed as a man for fifty-six years, which only came to light post-mortem. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was the first woman licensed to practise medicine by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries in 1865. The Medical Act of 1876 (39 and 40 Ch. 41) allowed medical authorities to licence qualified applicants regardless of gender.

<sup>53</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 105.

I do not stretch the reach of credibility to suggest the puncture marks on Holt's neck in the final book result from an attempt to perform a tracheotomy.<sup>54</sup> Carlos G. Musso states ancient Egyptian physicians 'were pioneers in describing tracheotomy to resolve high respiratory obstructions'.<sup>55</sup> Patric Blomstedt takes the contrary position, arguing that alleged depictions of this surgical procedure 'are difficult to reconcile with tracheostomy from an anatomical point of view and can more easily be explained as human sacrifices'.<sup>56</sup> There has been no makeshift operation to clear emaciated Holt's airway, but neither has there been an attempt to kill him. The abrasions to either side of his neck, though pretty deep, are proclaimed insufficient in themselves to cause death.<sup>57</sup> The coroner's jury concludes he fell victim to starvation and exhaustion, in contradiction to the chapter's title of 'The Man who was Murdered'.<sup>58</sup> There is no bruising around his throat, so whatever has gone on is not strangulation such as Lessingham inflicted on the Woman of the Songs, neither should the puncture marks be read as a vampiric draining of life. Entomologically speaking, a dung beetle would not develop the bloodsucking tendencies of a mosquito or flea, nor the powerful mandibles of a stag beetle.

Whatever takes place in the Limehouse lodging house, in the laboratory the Beetle stages an effective medical intervention on Woodville and follows it up by subjecting him to medicinal hypnosis, a healing method pioneered by respectable practitioners including Jean Marie Charcot in Paris, Professor Liébault in Nancy and Dr Charles William Lloyd Tuckey in London.<sup>59</sup> Lloyd Tuckey's earliest article on hypnotism, 'Faith Healing as a Medical Treatment' (1888) was aimed at the general

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<sup>54</sup> See Veiga, p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> Carlos G. Musso, 'Imhotep: The Dean Among the Ancient Egyptian Physicians: An example of a Complete physician', *Humane Medicine Health Care*, 5.1 (2005), 169.

<sup>56</sup> Patric Blomstedt, 'Tracheostomy in Ancient Egypt', *Journal of Laryngology and Otology*, 128.8 (2014), 665-68 (p. 665).

<sup>57</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 278.

<sup>58</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 274-79.

<sup>59</sup> Lloyd Tuckey was practicing hypnotherapy and defending it in articles and letters to *The Lancet* in the 1880s and 1890s. His obituary in the British Medical Journal states: 'he may be said to have been one of the pioneers of hypnotic treatment in England', *Br. Med. J.*, 2.363 (1925).

public, and his *Psycho-therapeutics or Treatment by Sleep and Suggestion* (1889) was read as far afield as the USA, resulting in William James, psychologist brother to Henry James, requesting Lloyd Tuckey treat their sister, Alice.<sup>60</sup> The medical community was seriously discussing the validity of hypnosis to aid recovery, and that discussion was seeping out into the wider world. Marsh's mesmerising Beetle is a frequenter of the temple of Isis as was Lloyd Tuckey, who was initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn at the London Isis-Urania Temple in 1894.<sup>61</sup> The *Praemonstratrix* was New Woman actress Florence Farr, author of *Egyptian Magic*, channeler of the wisdom of Isis, and chief instructor in magic.<sup>62</sup> The fictional Beetle Priestess and the factual London doctor are connected by mysticism, medicine, and the magic of Isis, and both of them direct their arcane and practical knowledge towards actions beneficial to others.<sup>63</sup>

Roger Luckhurst notes in *Trance Gothic* that '[c]ertainly hypnotic or mesmeric power is part of the repertory of the *fin-de-siècle* monster, and certainly representations of hypnosis are traversed by racial stereotyping [...], degenerate criminality [...], and sexual terrorism'.<sup>64</sup> All are present in *The Beetle*, however, my contention is that the mesmerism of medicine and the mesmerism of monstrosity need not be mutually exclusive. The Beetle invades the psyche of Holt to use him as an automaton and does the same with Marjorie Lindon, but, unlike her fictional

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<sup>60</sup> C. Lloyd Tuckey, 'Faith Healing a Medical Treatment', *The Nineteenth Century* 14 (1888), 839-50; C. Lloyd Tuckey M.D, *Psycho-therapeutics or Treatment by Sleep and Suggestion* (London: Baillière Tindall and Cox, 1889). The book had reached its seventh edition when he died.

<sup>61</sup> R. A. Gilbert *Membership of the Golden Dawn: The Golden Dawn Companion* (Northampton: The Aquarian Press, 1986).

<sup>62</sup> Farr had been initiated into the Isis-Urania temple by W. B. Yeats in 1890. By 1897 she had attained national leadership. See Florence Farr, *Egyptian Magic: Occult Mysteries in Ancient Egypt* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896; Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, NY: Park Street Press, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> C. Lloyd Tuckey M.D is listed as a new member of the Society of Psychical Research in *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*, 4 (1889-90). See also Sally Davis, 'Lloyd Tuckey'. <<http://www.wrightanddavis.co.uk/GD/TUCKEYCHARLES.htm>> [accessed 24 June 2021].

<sup>64</sup> Roger Luckhurst, 'Trance Gothic: 1882-1897', in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 148-67 (p. 150).

counterparts, her use of hypnotism is not unrelentingly unscrupulous as with Svengali in Du Maurier's *Trilby*, Miss Penclosa in Conan Doyle's *The Parasite*, or the devilish Aaron Lazarus in Marsh's *The House of Mystery*.<sup>65</sup> Ernest Hart in the *British Medical Journal* of 1895 and again in 1896 refers to hypnotism and mesmerism as 'the new witchcraft'.<sup>66</sup> In her use of it, the Beetle is not always a black witch. Her mind-controlling skill is used to cure. Simon Marsden in 'Evil, Privation and the Absent Logos' maintains Woodville's 'life is saved ironically by the Beetle', but Marsden's interpretation of the act as something performed 'ironically' follows on from his position the Beetle is irredeemably evil, which my next chapter challenges.<sup>67</sup> The Beetle has no vested interest in saving Percy Woodville, nevertheless she does just that calmly and effectively. She could have disregarded the fate of the prone stranger, yet she does not. Her intervention demonstrates an 'other-regarding' orientation, and in this way, the 'noxious insect' is not altogether beyond dispensing sympathy. The scarab steeped in the medical training of Ancient Egypt saves a life.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Egyptian craze was gathering pace with academics and archaeologists, travel writers and tourists, and those at home who consumed information on the ancient civilisation and relished representations of it. David Gange argues that it was only in the 1870s and 1880s Egyptology emerged as a specific discipline.<sup>68</sup> Eleanor Dobson's and Nicola Tonks's discussion on 'Ancient Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Culture' draws a distinction between Egyptology and Egyptomania. Egyptology, they define as a rigorous discipline based on historical and

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<sup>65</sup> George Du Maurier, *Trilby* (London: Osgood, Mcilvaine, 1895); Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Parasite* (London: Constable & Co., 1894).

<sup>66</sup> Ernest Hart, 'Review of *Trilby*', *British Medical Journal* (16 November 1895), reprinted in *Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), p. 206-10; William Hughes, *That Devils, Trick: Hypnotism and the Victorian Popular Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2018).

<sup>67</sup> Simon Marsden, ' "Nothing Moved, Nothing was Seen, Nothing was Heard and Nothing Happened": Evil, Privation and the Absent Logos in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', *Gothic Studies*, 19.1 (2017), 57-72 (p. 67).

<sup>68</sup> David Gange, *Dialogues with the Dead: Egyptology in British Culture and Religion, 1822–1922* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 1–2.



scientific analysis, and Egyptomania as the manifestation of enthusiasm for Egypt — in particular, the country's ancient past — in the cultural consciousness more broadly.<sup>69</sup> In parallel existed Egyptosophy, defined by Erik Hornung in *The Secret Lore of Egypt* as 'the study of an imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of all esoteric lore'.<sup>70</sup> Academics, collectors, authors and mystics interacted as their interests overlapped. Steve Vinson and Janet Gunn observe: 'the various scholarly disciplines that had emerged to study the past, and the systematic pursuit of occult knowledge, were flip-sides of one coin'.<sup>71</sup>

Florence Farr, proponent of Egyptosophy and amateur Egyptologist spent much time at the British Museum, and her literary output targeted at initiates and devotees constituted fantastical beliefs governed by disciplined research.<sup>72</sup> Theosophical Society matriarch, Helena Blavatsky revered *The Book of the Dead* and studied *The Ebers Papyrus*. Marion Meade recounts that an early name proposed for Blavatsky's organisation was 'The Egyptological Society'.<sup>73</sup> A notable figure more firmly rooted in the real Egypt rather than esoteric visions of it was Georg Ebers, discoverer and translator of the medical papyrus, who spanned academia and populism and wrote a series of Egyptian romances including *Uarda: A Romance of Ancient Egypt* (1877), *The Bride of the Nile* (1887) and *Cleopatra* (1894). In the populist camp was Marsh, but divides were blurred. Of his fellow writers, Egyptosophical Marie Corelli liked to think of herself as being on the Egyptological fringes, Stoker was

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<sup>69</sup> Eleanor Dobson & Nichola Tonks, 'Introduction: Ancient Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Culture', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 40.4 (2018), 311-15 (p. 311).

<sup>70</sup> Erik Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001).

<sup>71</sup> Steve Vinson and Janet Gunn, 'Studies in Esoteric Syntax: The Enigmatic Friendship of Aleister Crowley and Battiscombe Gunn', in *Histories of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*, ed. William Carruthers (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 96–112 (p. 109).

<sup>72</sup> Caroline Tully, 'Egyptosophy in the British Museum: Florence Farr, the Egyptian Adept and the *Ka*', in *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875-1947* ed Christine Ferguson and Andrew Radford (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 131-45.

<sup>73</sup> Hornung, pp. 142, 83; Marion Meade, *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman and the Myth* (New York: Putnam's, 1980), p. 151.

certainly a scholarly researcher in this field, and H. Rider Haggard was a traveller, avid collector, and an esoteric Egyptologist.

Egyptology, Egyptomania and to a lesser extent, Egyptosophy, fed back and forth in a relationship that was symbiotic and evolving. Dobson in *Writing the Sphinx* discovers ‘close and multifaceted interactions between literature and the Egyptological’, and notes how narratives ‘by no means exist entirely outside of Egyptological discourse [... but] become part of a broader conversation in which specialists and dilettantes communicate, however begrudgingly.’<sup>74</sup> Willis too notes in *Vision, Science and Literature* that the subject positions of Egyptologist, archaeologist, travel writer and novelist are ‘porous’, and ‘interact with and influence one another to the extent that their own viewing [and recording] conventions multiply and overlap’.<sup>75</sup> In the context of fine art, Robert Verhoogt challenges any approach to Alma-Tadema — friend of Egyptologist and novelist, Ebers — mistakenly adopting a binary view of Egyptology and Egyptomania.<sup>76</sup> In multiple genres the two are in sympathy not in opposition. The dialogue between Egyptology and Egyptomania is ongoing, and around the *fin de siècle*, when engagement with Egypt reached what Dobson calls a ‘fortuitous syzygy’, it exerted a powerful attraction manifesting in multiple milieux such as architecture, jewellery, fashion, fine art, and in Gothic fiction.<sup>77</sup> It is in such locations I seek for affinities with the ancient civilisation, and specifically with its totemic insect.

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<sup>74</sup> Eleanor Dobson, *Writing the Sphinx: Literature, Culture and Egyptology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020), pp. 15, 62; Eleanor Dobson, ‘Introduction’, in *Victorian Literary Culture and Ancient Egypt*, ed. by Eleanor Dobson (Manchester UP, 2020), pp. 1-19.

<sup>75</sup> Martin Willis, *Vision, Science and Literature, 1870-1920: Ocular Horizons* (Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), pp. 118, 163.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Verhoogt, ‘Alma-Tadema’s Egyptian Dream: Ancient Egypt in the Work of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 40.4 (2018), 377-95.

<sup>77</sup> Dobson, *Sphinx*, p. 225; Ronald H. Fritze, *Egyptomania: A History of Fascination, Obsession and Fantasy* (London: Reaktion, 2016).

## Egyptian Gothic and the Egyptian Beetle

The fascination of Egyptologists with sacred beetles bled into Egyptomania, effectively creating a subcategory of Scarabmania, although this was nothing like as prominent as Mummymania. Dobson and Tonks's review of nineteenth-century Ancient Egypt Reception Studies finds there to be a strong thematic thread on mummies, and they cite as key examples two critical texts both called *The Mummy's Curse*.<sup>78</sup> In 2006 Jasmine Day subtitled it *Mummymania in the English-Speaking World*, and in 2012, Luckhurst subtitled his text, already cited in relation to Wallis Budge and Rider Haggard, *The True History of a Dark Fantasy*.<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Daly and Bradley Deane likewise identify the fetish of the cursing mummy and necrophiliac, love-interest mummy as late nineteenth-century trends in popular fiction.<sup>80</sup> My concentration on scarabmania as opposed to the hitherto default sub-category of mummymania and my juxtaposition of the resurrection myth of Khepri with *The Beetle* constitutes a relatively unusual contribution to a largely unexplored field of Egyptian study.

Day's primary focus is on mummies, but she does refer to two early American short stories which heavily feature scarabs functioning as retributive vampiric agencies for the violation of a tomb.<sup>81</sup> So prominent are those scarabs, I include them in my own co-edited anthology of the Insect Weird.<sup>82</sup> In the anonymously written 'The Mummy's Soul' (1862), a heart scarab bears a message which is both threat and

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<sup>78</sup> Dobson and Tonks, 314.

<sup>79</sup> Jasmine Day, *The Mummy's Curse: Mummymania in the English-Speaking World* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>80</sup> Nicholas Daly, 'That Obscure of Desire: Victorian Commodity Culture and Fictions of the Mummy', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 28.1 (1994), 24–51; Bradley Deane, 'Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt: Imperial Striptease', *ELT*, 51.4 (2008), 381–410.

<sup>81</sup> Jasmine Day, 'The Mummy Speaks: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Mummy in Literature, Theatre and Politics.'

<[https://www.academia.edu/2940114/The\\_mummy\\_speaks\\_an\\_interdisciplinary\\_study\\_of\\_the\\_mummy\\_in\\_literature\\_theatre\\_and\\_politics\\_UNPUBLISHED](https://www.academia.edu/2940114/The_mummy_speaks_an_interdisciplinary_study_of_the_mummy_in_literature_theatre_and_politics_UNPUBLISHED)> [accessed 27 June 2021].

<sup>82</sup> *Crawling Horror: Creeping Tales of the Insect Weird*, ed. by Daisy Butcher and Janette Leaf (London: British Library Publishing 2021), pp. 35–56, 57–76.

prophecy.<sup>83</sup> It is accompanied by a revived insect with a needle-like proboscis, generically defined as a 'fly', but more akin to a monstrous mosquito. It causes the narrator's wife to become as desiccated as the mummy whose wrappings are disturbed, and which regains its life as she loses hers.

From a mass of beads and shreds of cloth, I picked out a stone *Scarabæus* ... and an insect of enormous size [...] And the insect lived on human blood! [...] As my eye glanced along the ceiling, the red dots thereon were a revelation of the cause of my wife's suffering; and were proofs of the injection into her veins of a subtle poison, to dry up her blood and parch the fair skin. ... I cast [the insect] into the flames ... I looked at the [inscription on the underside of the *scarabæus*]: 'Three thousand years hence, a new life.' ... O my GOD! In a chair behind me sat the mummy of the tomb, alive, watching me with its small cunning eyes ...<sup>84</sup>

Jane Goodwin Austin's 'After Three Thousand Years' (1868) describes the theft of a scarab necklace from around the neck of a mummy bringing death to the narrator's beloved when the reanimated beetles display tenacious tic-like tendencies and drain her life. Taxonomic exactitude is made subservient to the requirement for parasitic associations.<sup>85</sup>

[Marion] lay ... royal in death ... [with] a necklace of golden scarabæi about the throat ... The beetles ... appeared to have suddenly assumed life ... Each of [their] legs ended in a minute claw ... fastened deep in the flesh beneath ... [original punctuation].<sup>86</sup>

In both stories the predation of the insects is directed at fair, young, nineteenth-century women as punishment for their men having carried out sacrilegious acts in Egypt. A similar trope is present in Marsh's novel in the persecution

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<sup>83</sup> Anonymous, 'The Mummy's Soul', *Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine*, 59.5 (1862), pp. 435–46.

<sup>84</sup> Anon, *Mummy's Soul*, p. 445.

<sup>85</sup> Jane Goodwin Austin, 'After Three Thousand Years', *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art*, 12.7 (1868), 38–45.

<sup>86</sup> Austin, 44.

of Marjorie Lindon by the Beetle. The aforementioned short stories of Egyptian horror were written across the Atlantic long before Budge's translation of the *Book of the Dead* or Myer's work on scarabs, which timing may have bearing on their tone. They pre-date *The Beetle* by three decades and I do not argue for curse narratives such as these or Gray's malevolent scarab referred to in my introduction as influences upon Marsh's novel except in a very remote way if at all. Their inclusion in this thesis is to demonstrate that the search for a sympathetic insect may uncover utterly unsympathetic specimens.

Ailise Bulfin's essay on 'The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia' agrees with Day about mummymania, noting that 'representations of intrusive Egyptian alterity' are variable, but the most frequent form is that of a revived mummy.<sup>87</sup> Marsh's creation is a clear exception on which Bulfin comments: 'the villain of the most popular supernatural Egyptian tale, *The Beetle*, is one of the most loosely defined creatures in *fin-de-siècle* gothic — not a mummy, but rather some type of demonic scarab incarnation.'<sup>88</sup> Her statement is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, in placing *The Beetle* at the top of popular supernatural Egyptian tales she offers excellent justification for studying the novel in depth; secondly, in considering the Beetle as 'loosely defined' she expresses a view discounting taxonomic linkage to Egyptian culture; and thirdly her use of the adjective 'demonic' betrays a moral judgement which I shall explore further in my next chapter.

Bulfin is the Marsh scholar who most closely examines nineteenth-century Anglo-Egyptian political history and its influence on *fin-de-siècle* Gothic fiction. She places *The Beetle* 'precisely' within this context 'rather than reading it against general imperial concerns', and she provides an invaluable resource in charting Egyptian Gothic's roots to the geopolitical upheaval occasioned by Ferdinand de Lesseps's Suez

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<sup>87</sup> Ailise Bulfin, 'The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia: The Curse of the Suez Canal', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 54.4 (July 2011), 411–43 (p. 419).

<sup>88</sup> Bulfin, 'Fiction of Gothic Egypt', 419.

Canal project.<sup>89</sup> Opened in 1869, the canal became integral to the running of the British Empire, cutting a swathe through the land of the Pharaohs to connect the Orient with the Occident. The unofficial occupation of Egypt in 1882 by the British to protect their access to the waterway, and the consequent ambiguousness of their relationship with a nation characterised by growing Islamic nationalist tendencies, prompted what was known as the 'Egypt Question'. It was a question with which writers including Marsh engaged via the medium of Gothic fiction. Luckhurst agrees with Bulfin that *The Beetle* 'demands to be located with historical precision', but he then follows it up with the provocative comment: 'Marsh only ever exploits Egypt as a superficial locus of phobic racism'.<sup>90</sup> This thesis strongly disagrees. Even if Marsh was opportunistically catering to what was topical, the scarab beetle's conceptual links to renaissance, and by extension to nationalist resurgence, are deeply rooted in the territory of Egypt and very far from 'superficial'.

Elleke Boehmer argues in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, that the British Empire was itself inherently textual: 'the Empire in its heyday was conceived and maintained by way of text — political treatises, diaries, acts and edicts, administrative records and gazetteers, missionaries' reports, notebooks [...] the triple decker novel and the best-selling adventure tale'.<sup>91</sup> Bulfin also notes the intertwining of Empire and literature, drawing on Edward Said's argument in *Culture and Imperialism*: 'contemporaneously with developments in Anglo-Egyptian politics, a subgenre of Egyptian-themed gothic fiction began to grow in popularity, within which concerns over the Egyptian situation tended to find fictional expression in the form of the supernatural invader'.<sup>92</sup> What I am pulling out here is Bulfin identifying the defining feature of Egyptian Gothic as 'a paranoid subgenre of popular fiction', characterised

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<sup>89</sup> Alise Bulfin, 'Situating *The Beetle* Within the Fin-de-Siècle Fiction of Gothic Egypt', in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp. 127-47 (p. 128).

<sup>90</sup> Luckhurst, *Mummy's Curse: Dark Fantasy*, p. 173.

<sup>91</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> Bulfin, 'Fiction of Gothic Egypt', 412. Bulfin is effectively referring to Invasion Gothic, a concept floated by Vuohelainen in ' "You Know Not of What You Speak" ', p. 316.

by 'the irruption of vengeful, supernatural, ancient Egyptian forces in civilised, rational, modern England.'<sup>93</sup> Bulfin pinpoints Boothby's *Pharos the Egyptian* as the most extreme 'narrative of retributive mass extermination'.<sup>94</sup> From that novel in particular, and Egyptian Gothic in general, she teases out underlying references to political instability in Egypt, a subject repeatedly given coverage in newspapers, stimulating a sense of unease. Bulfin echoes Said in noting the inevitable invasion of colonial history and current affairs into the literary realm. Commenting in *Orientalism* on literary fiction, Said observes: '[t]o write about Egypt [...] was a matter of touring the realm of political will, political management, political definition'.<sup>95</sup> Imperial anxiety infiltrates fiction. The very fact of introducing an Egyptian element into a novel is inevitably to introduce a colonially infused commentary on political events, even if at a sub-textual level. It led to a Gothicising of Egypt and an Egyptianising of the Gothic. The eyes of Horus on the spine of *The Beetle* warn the reader what to look out for.

Critical analysis of *The Beetle* was negligible during the mid-twentieth century. When the novel did come to the notice of an academic community seeking to give it literary contextualisation, it was often considered as a companion piece to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in essays such as: Rhys Garnett's 'Dracula and The Beetle'; Tim Youngs's 'The Bat and the Beetle'; and Stephan Karschay's 'Othering the Degenerate'.<sup>96</sup> Vampire and scarab parallel readings have undoubted merit, however, maintaining a stricter Egyptian focus and approaching Marsh's text alongside *fin-de-*

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<sup>93</sup> Bulfin, 'Fiction of Gothic Egypt', 412.

<sup>94</sup> Bulfin, 'Fiction of Gothic Egypt', 412.

<sup>95</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 169.

<sup>96</sup> Rhys Garnett, 'Dracula and The Beetle: Imperial and Sexual Guilt and Fear in Late Victorian Fantasy', in *Science Fiction Roots and Branches: Contemporary Critical Approaches*, ed. by Rhys Garnett & R. J. Ellis (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1990), pp. 30-54; Tim Youngs, 'The Bat and the Beetle', in Tim Youngs, *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the Fin de Siècle* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013), pp. 74-106; Stephan Karschay, 'Othering the Degenerate: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', in *Degeneration, Normativity, and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 124-67.

*siècle* fiction with a similar cultural, geographical, and religious specificity exposes facets of the novel perhaps previously hidden.

The first of the contemporaneous texts to be considered is H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1888), which both Patrick Brantlinger and Fred Botting are content to encompass within the Gothic genre.<sup>97</sup> Speaking of *She* in his discussion on 'Gothic Returns in the 1890s', Botting comments: 'the East, at the high point of Victorian imperialism, provided many wonderful adventures and strange tales, which [...] in Rider Haggard's narratives of Africa, projected the darkness of Gothic fears and desires on to other cultures, peoples and places'.<sup>98</sup> Other examples of Egyptian Gothic under consideration as comparable to *The Beetle* are Marie Corelli's *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* (1897) and Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903). Along with *She*, each of the four tales revolves around a supernatural woman connected with Egypt, whose defiance of death and fixed purpose drives the plot. Guy Boothby's *Pharos the Egyptian* (1899) sits a little outside the quartet since it foregrounds a supernatural Egyptian man.

Constraints of space dictate a narrowing of focus on Gothicised Egyptian scarabs as living insects, inanimate objects or sub-textual messengers of regeneration. H. Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra* (1889) is omitted from this examination because its situatedness in ancient times and not in the late-Victorian era means it is historical fiction.<sup>99</sup> I also discount Theo Douglas's revivification romance *Iras: A Mystery* (1896) which, although it shares a common subtitle with *The Beetle* and features a revived Egyptian woman, contains a paucity of beetles. Arthur Conan Doyle's Egyptian short stories 'The Ring of Thoth' (1890) and 'Lot 249' (1892) are excluded for the same

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<sup>97</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure* (London: Longmans Green and Co, 1888); Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic', *Victorian Gothic*, p. 203.

<sup>98</sup> Fred Botting, 'Gothic Returns in the 1890s', in *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 88-100 (p. 100).

<sup>99</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Cleopatra* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1889).



reason.<sup>100</sup> 'The Ring of Thoth' does not mention scarabs at all. Its titular crystal-set ring contains a suicide-potion that liberates a deathless priest from life and is not a scarab ring offering hope for his mummified lover's rebirth. The khepris in 'Lot 249' serve only momentarily as decorative backdrop: 'strange beetle-like deities cut out of the blue lapis lazuli'.<sup>101</sup> The insects in Conan Doyle's *The Beetle Hunter* are mainly an adjectival mechanism for establishing common ground between doctor and lunatic, and, because the beetles are not explicitly Egyptian, the tale is even less pertinent to this present investigation located at the intersection of Egyptomania and Beetlemania.<sup>102</sup> My focus is on Egyptian Gothic scarabs.

Luckhurst identifies Egyptian Gothic as 'a cultural formation that emerged and permeated popular culture from the 1880s to the 1930s [...] a set of beliefs or knowledges in a loosely occult framework'.<sup>103</sup> He proposes Marsh's tale as '[p]erhaps the most hysterical contribution to the genre'.<sup>104</sup> Certainly the characters encountering the Beetle in insect form betray — psychologically and physiologically — uncontrollable fear and dread with instinctive and extreme reactions typifying the affect of horror. If this is what Luckhurst intends by 'hysterical', then this thesis concurs, although his statement glosses over the fourth book's comedic elements and the rationalism Champnell tries to bring to affairs, admittedly never having come into direct contact with the 'monster'. Within the genre of Egyptian Gothic, Luckhurst identifies an emotional spectrum ranging from 'fear, vengeance and persecutory

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<sup>100</sup> Theo Douglas (pseudonym of Henrietta Dorothy Everett), *Iras: A Mystery* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1896); Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Ring of Thoth' [*Cornhill Magazine* (1890)], in *The Great Kleinplatz Experiment and Other Tales of the Unseen* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1910), pp. 139-62; Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Lot 249' [*Harper's Magazine* (September 1892)], in *The Great Kleinplatz Experiment*, pp. 179-224.

<sup>101</sup> 'Lot 249', p. 187.

<sup>102</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Beetle Hunter' [*Strand Magazine* (1898)], in *Tales of Terror and Mystery* (London: John Murray, 1922).

<sup>103</sup> Roger Luckhurst 'The Mummy's Curse: A Genealogy', in *Magic, Science, Technology and Literature*, ed. by Jarmila Mildorf, Hans-Ulrich Seeber and Martin Windisch (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), pp. 122-45 (p. 123).

<sup>104</sup> Roger Luckhurst, 'The Curse Tale and the Egyptian Gothic', in *Mummy's Curse: Dark Fantasy*, pp. 153-83 (p. 171).

paranoia' to 'fascination, awe, allure, desire, and even religious transcendence.'<sup>105</sup> *The Beetle* sits very much at the 'vengeance and persecutory paranoia' end of the spectrum with *She*, *Ziska*, and *The Jewel of Seven Stars* more oriented towards 'desire, and even religious transcendence', which is not to say that their alluring characters refrain from wreaking vengeance. Religious transcendence is particularly prevalent in the works of Egyptosophical Marie Corelli and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Taking the novels in chronological order offers clarity on those exerting an influence on successors, and H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) comes first.<sup>106</sup> Rudyard Kipling dubbed Rider Haggard the 'King of Egypt' for his belief he was a reincarnated Ancient Egyptian, for his extensive collection of Egyptian objects, and for his literary works.<sup>107</sup> He claimed to know more of the people, civilisation and history of ancient Egypt than he did of his own country, and travelled to Egypt four times between 1887 and 1924 where he added to his collection of artefacts, some of which he wrote into his fiction.<sup>108</sup> There is even an entry for him in the Egypt Exploration Society's *Who Was Who in Egyptology*.<sup>109</sup> *She* concerns Ayesha, who in Brantlinger's eyes is 'gorgeous rather than abhuman, but nevertheless monstrous'.<sup>110</sup> She dwells among the mummies of a society who founded the ancient Egyptian civilisation, and she awaits the return of Kallikrates, her lover and obsession. Generations later, the hero of the novel, Leo Vincey, locates her with the help of friend and expert Egyptologist, Holly, who decodes three artefacts, one of which is a small chocolate-coloured scarab.

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<sup>105</sup> Luckhurst, *Mummy's Curse: Dark Fantasy*, p. 158.

<sup>106</sup> Prior to its 1887 publication in novel form by Longmans Green and Co., *She* had been serialised in British weekly, *The Graphic* (October 1886-January 1887).

<sup>107</sup> Roger Luckhurst, 'Rider Haggard Amongst the Mummies', in *Mummy's Curse: Dark Fantasy*, pp. 185-207; Patrick Brantlinger, 'Mummy Love: *She* and Archaeology', in *"She": Explorations into a Romance*, ed. by Tania Zulli (Rome: Aracne, 2009), pp. 37-58.

<sup>108</sup> Shirley M. Addy, *Rider Haggard and Egypt* (Accrington: A.L. Publications, 1998); Lillias Rider Haggard, *The Cloak That I Left: A Biography of the Author Henry Rider Haggard* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), p. 183.

<sup>109</sup> Warren R. Dawson and Eric P. Uphill, 'HAGGARD, (Sir) Henry Rider (1856-1925)', in *Who Was Who in Egyptology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1995), p. 185.

<sup>110</sup> Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic', *Victorian Gothic*, 204.

Stephen Coan, in ‘Rider Haggard and the writing of *She*’, comments that with the scarab the author was not creating a faux archaeological object, he was working from an ancient artefact acquired from Egyptologist and scarab expert, William Loftie.<sup>111</sup> The real object made of steatite and inscribed with the identical legend to the fictional one was later donated by Rider Haggard to Norwich Castle Museum where it remains.<sup>112</sup> ‘Suten se Ra,’ translates as the ‘Royal Son of Ra or the Sun’, an appropriate epithet for Leo with his Greco-Egyptian heritage and Apollonian good looks. Small enough to be mounted into a signet ring, as Rider Haggard did with his own scarab, the one in the novel functions as ornamental heirloom, messenger, and verification of Leo’s identity as Kallikrates’s descendent. Ayesha recognises it instantly and challenges Holly:

“Man, whence hadst thou that scarab on thy hand? [...] But the scarab—about the scarabaeus! [...] It is very strange [...] but once I knew a scarab like to that. It hung around the neck—of one I loved.” and she gave a little sob, and I saw that after all she was only a woman, although she might be a very old one.

“There,” she went on, “it must be one like to it, and yet never did I see one like to it, for thereto hung a history, and he who wore it prized it much. [\*] But the scarab that I knew was not set thus in the bezel of a ring.”<sup>113</sup>

Within the framework of the text, in the [\*] there is a footnote to Ayesha’s words.

What the history of this particular scarab may have been we can now, unfortunately, never know, but I have little doubt but that it played some part in the tragic story of Amenartas and her lover Kallikrates, the forsworn priest of Isis,—Editor.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Stephen Coan, ‘Rider Haggard and the writing of *She*’, in “*She*”: *Explorations*, ed. Zulli, pp. 115-38 (p.126). Loftie designed Rider Haggard’s Egyptian letter-heading and bookplate in 1888. See Billie Melman, *Empires of Antiquities: Modernity and the Rediscovery of the Ancient Near East, 1914-1950* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020), p. 304.

<sup>112</sup> Faye Kallionatis, *The Egyptian Collection at Norwich Castle Museum: Catalogue and Essays* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), pp. 10, 353. The scarab ring measures 1.3cm x 1cm and is listed as catalogue number 444.

<sup>113</sup> Haggard, *She*, pp. 138-39.

<sup>114</sup> Haggard, *She*, p. 140.

The scarab is the device which convinces Ayesha to minister to Leo who otherwise would have died in the absence of her skill as pharmacist and physician. It is both prompt for her medical intervention and component of an eternal love story. The sympathetic role of the insect icon is, however, complicated by being part of a commandment of vengeance passed down to Leo through thousands of years. It requires him to seek justice against Ayesha, the ancient murderess who slew Kallikrates for preferring pregnant Amenartas. The scarab therefore sits right at the heart of Rider Haggard's plot, a material object within the text where it metaphorically speaks and commands and a physical object in Norwich museum where it remains.

Like Rider Haggard's Ayesha, Marie Corelli's Ziska yearns to reconnect with her reincarnated lover Araxes and join him in psychic union. Simultaneously, Ziska wants to punish him for having taken her life when a dancing girl in Ancient Egypt, and in this melange of passion and vengeance *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* mirrors *The Beetle* also published in 1897. My first chapter compared Ziska and the Beetle in terms of race, appearance, and geographical location. This chapter briefly revisits Corelli's novel to position it within Egyptian Gothic and focus on the scarab adornment worn by the supernatural Egyptian: 'the jeweled scarab set as a brooch on her bosom, flashed luridly in the moon, and in her black eyes there was a similar lurid gleam'.<sup>115</sup> Ziska, as the subtitle of the book indicates, has a '*Wicked Soul*'. If the scarab resembles her in being 'lurid', the insect icon may by association borrow from its wearer, wickedness, as well as sharing her unreadability, death-defying rebirth, and attractiveness underlaid with repulsiveness. Although not prominent within Corelli's plot, the sacred beetle is a subtextual reinforcement of Ziska's key characteristics. Corelli writes a more prominent Egyptian beetle into *The Sorrows of Satan*, which, because it is not a novel in the genre of Egyptian Gothic, is deferred until my third

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<sup>115</sup> Corelli, *Ziska*, p. 85.

chapter where it is considered in the context of transmigrations of the soul and representations of evil.<sup>116</sup>

In *The Beetle*, quite apart from in the metamorphosed insect form of the protagonist, scarabs are present in the entomological emblems thronging the Temple of Isis into which Lessingham inadvertently stumbles when a young man. He recalls the event to Champnell.

On the idol's brow was poised a beetle. That the creature was alive seemed clear, for, as I looked at it, it opened and shut its wings.

If the one on the forehead of the goddess was the only live beetle which the place contained, it was not the only representation. It was modelled in the solid stone of the roof, and depicted in flaming colours on hangings which here and there were hung against the walls. Wherever the eye turned it rested on a scarab. The effect was bewildering. It was as though one saw things through the distorted glamour of a nightmare.<sup>117</sup>

Isis is the chief Egyptian goddess, notable for bringing about the resurrection of her brother and husband, Osiris, who becomes god of the underworld. She, as one of her many roles, assists all deceased as they enter the afterlife. Khepri too is a divine presence attendant at the journey of the dead. When Isis manifests with the attributes of Hathor, the preeminent Egyptian goddess of earlier times, she wears a headdress with the horns of a cow holding the solar disk. The image reflects the oft depicted stance of Khepri with his beetle antennae holding the solar disk. The presence of Isis and Khepri in the afterlife, together with their sun-bearing iconography demonstrate a clear connection between the two deities that is both ritual and visual. Whether Marsh's inclusion of beetles in the temple of Isis is ingenious or fortuitous, his proposition is by no means far-fetched. Khepri had neither cult devoted exclusively to him nor any temple of his own as did Sobek, the crocodile-

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<sup>116</sup> Marie Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, the Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire* (London: Methuen, 1895).

<sup>117</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 212.

headed god at Kom Ombo or Bast the cat goddess at Bubastis, but the sacred scarab was strongly present in the temples of other gods.<sup>118</sup> It is little wonder that indoctrinated by an ancient religion with beetle images on the rings of devotees and scarabs nestled among their funerary wrappings, the Woman of the Songs metamorphoses into the Beetle, sacred symbol of resurrection and icon of comforting familiarity. Khepri represents the dream of eternal life. Lessingham's conception of the insect as a 'writhing creation of some wild nightmare' speaks more for his own squirming, guilty conscience, and disturbed dreams than it does for the creature's cultural associations.<sup>119</sup>

Like Marsh, Boothby was attuned to what was of topical interest and would sell well to the mass market, and immediately following a visit to Egypt, he brought out *Pharos the Egyptian* (1899). Pharos, mentioned earlier as a skilled medic and virologist, is the reincarnated Priest-Magician Ptahmes, a physically repulsive mesmerist who exploits an enchanting female psychic, stabs a seller of antiquities because of a refusal to hand over a ring set with a scarabaeus which is indispensable to his master plan, and who controls Forrester, Orientalist painter and son of the Egyptologist who stole his mummy.<sup>120</sup> In an unimpressed review of the novel, the *Academy* comments that the Ancient Egyptian exacting vengeance on modern England for its crime 'is of course a mummy' [my emphasis], thereby confirming the overuse of the trope and Marsh's originality in selecting a scarab as the monstrous embodiment of Egypt.<sup>121</sup> *Pharos* exposes the sacrilegious aspect of tomb raiding under the guise of colonial privilege, and he instigates a vendetta by making Forrester

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<sup>118</sup> Geraldine Pinch, *Handbook of Egyptian Mythology* (London: ABC-CLIO, 2001), pp. 152-53; Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004); Salima Ikram, *Divine Creatures: Animal Mummies in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).

<sup>119</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 215.

<sup>120</sup> Forrester's Orientalist art synthesises that of Frederick Goodall (1822-1904), Edwin Long (1829-1891), Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) and Edward Poynter (1836-1919).

<sup>121</sup> *Academy* 1405 (April 1899), 407; quoted in Bulfin, 'Fiction of Gothic Egypt', 422.

the vector of a virulent plague that decimates Europe. In contrast, the Beetle's mission is personally targeted and not genocidal. She is quite simply not as dangerous.

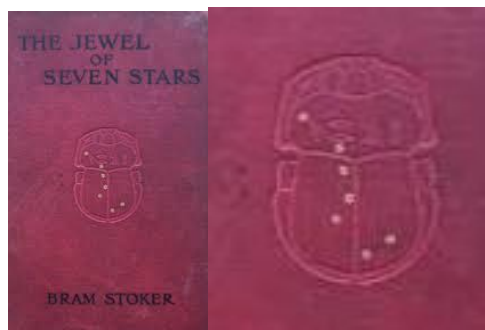


Figure II:1

Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*  
(London: William Heinemann, 1903)

Left: Front Cover Featuring Scarab

Right: Scarab detail.

Bram Stoker's contribution to Egyptian Gothic is *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), a title which references not the central supernatural character, but the name by which her precious heart scarab is known. Scarabs are everywhere throughout the novel, literally, figuratively, philosophically, and materially on the front of it. Re-imagining the beetle-adorned, blood-red cover of Marsh's book, Heinemann's 1903 first edition shown in Figure II:1 is also beetle-adorned, this time with the stylised version rather than the real creature.<sup>122</sup> Within the pages, Egyptologist Trelawney's associate refers to his obsession with the myths, legends and artefacts of Ancient Egypt as an insect-born infection: 'I fell in with Egyptology, I must have been bitten by some powerful scarab'.<sup>123</sup> A consequence of Trelawney's own Egyptomania is his acquisition of numerous beautiful and expensive scarabs: 'great scarabs of gold, agate, green jasper, amethyst, lapis lazuli, opal, granite and blue green china,' and a 'small scarab, exquisitely wrought of emerald'.<sup>124</sup> Scarab rings and amulets throng his

<sup>122</sup> Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (London, William Heinemann, 1903). 'Book Covers: *The Jewel of Seven Stars*' <<http://www.bramstoker.org/novels/covers/08starsbc.html>> [accessed 27 June 2021].

<sup>123</sup> Unless explicitly stated otherwise, quotations appear in both 1903 and 1912 versions and are taken from the U.S. reprint, Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (New York, W. R. Caldwell & Co, 1904). Stoker, *Jewel*, p. 58.

<sup>124</sup> Stoker, *Jewel*, pp. 50, 117.

cabinets of aesthetically pleasing collectibles. His most valuable of these treasures is the titular scarab of seven stars described at some length.

It was carven—it could not possibly have been its natural shape, but jewels do not show the working of the tool—into the shape of a scarab, with its wings folded, and its legs and feelers pressed back to its sides. Shining through its wondrous "pigeon's blood" colour were seven different stars. [...] On it were some hieroglyphic figures cut with the most exquisite precision. [...] The reverse was no less wonderful than the upper, being carved to resemble the under side of the beetle. It too, had some hieroglyphic figures cut into it.<sup>125</sup>

It is this blood red jewel discovered in the tomb of intelligent, ruthless Queen Tera, which, along with her sarcophagus, Trelawney has brought back to England expressly to reanimate her perfectly preserved mummy.

The ruby scarab plays an intrinsic part in Tera's strategic enterprise. It is to be employed along with the seven lamps that reproduce its seven starred markings to aid the female Pharaoh in her resurrection and re-assertion of power. A pawn in her scheme is Margaret, Tera's physical double over whom she exercises psychic control. Tera possesses skin of ivory whiteness, ostensibly signalling her suitability as an object of sexual desire in contrast to the yellowness of the Beetle, but her name carries a warning. Tera is not only a near homophone for terror, it derives from the Greek *τέρας* for monster.<sup>126</sup> Dobson may be picking up on this etymology with her comment: 'Tera is a monster who corrupts the modern female, an ancient prototype'.<sup>127</sup> Like the Beetle, Tera is a mesmerist. At the end of his novel, Marsh apparently wipes out the supernatural Egyptian and Marjorie survives, even if traumatised by her experience. In Stoker's 1903 *Jewel*, Margaret dies and Tera succeeds in coming back to life. By means of the scarab the Egyptian defies death.

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<sup>125</sup> Stoker, *Jewel*, p. 217.

<sup>126</sup> For a more extended discussion, see Glennis Byron, 'Bram Stoker's Gothic and the Resources of Science', *Critical Survey*, 19.2 (2007), 48-62 (p. 61).

<sup>127</sup> Eleanor Dobson, 'Cross Dressing Scholars and Mummies in Drag: Egyptology and Queer Identity', *Aegyptiaca Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt* 4 (2018), 33-54 (p. 45).



Just before Stoker died in 1912, either voluntarily as self-censorship or at the instigation of his new publishers, William Rider & Son Ltd., he changed the ending of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* so that, instead of archaeologist Trelawney, his associates, and his daughter expiring *en masse*, it is the female Pharaoh who perishes in the great experiment.<sup>128</sup> Stoker also sacrificed Chapter XVI entitled 'Powers Old and New', in which Trelawney offers a pseudo-scientific hypothesis for dung beetles and the defiance of death. An extract is given here.

One might almost hazard a suggestion that taking the scarab as the symbol of life may not have been without an empiric basis. Might it not be possible that Coprophagi have power or instinct to seize upon the minute particles of heat-giving, light-giving—perhaps life-giving—radium, and enclosing them with their ova in those globes of matter which they roll so assiduously, and from which they take their early name, Pilulariae.<sup>129</sup>

The removal of the chapter has the residual effect that the amended version of the novel connects rebirth to cow-headed Hathor and the god of the rising sun, Harmachis, instead of to Khepri's beetle. The alterations dilute the cultural cohesiveness between the living insect and the seven-starred scarab, weakening Stoker's 1912 text compared to his initial conception. In the re-written ending on Margaret's wedding day, Stoker nods towards the jewelled beetle's function as a heart scarab:

On her breast, set in a ring of gold made like a twisted lotus stalk, she wore the strange Jewel of Seven Stars which held words to command the God of all the worlds. At the marriage the sunlight streaming through the chancel windows fell on it, and it seemed to glow like a living thing.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Deane suggests it may have been written by someone other than Stoker, 406. See also Luz Elena Ramirez, 'The Intelligibility of the Past in Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*', in *Victorian Literary Culture and Ancient Egypt*, pp.185-205 (p. 187).

<sup>129</sup> Stoker, *Jewel* 1903, pp. 137-38.

<sup>130</sup> Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, ed. David Glover (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), p. 241.

The bloody-hued scarab has become an ornament with circumscribed potency, its vitality only illusory, the invocation on its underside silenced.

Stoker's *Jewel of Seven Stars* is peopled by fictional Egyptologists and cites Egyptologists. In his archaeological Egyptian Gothic, scarabs are artefacts. *The Beetle* cites entomologists and contains a scientist narrator with entomological knowledge thereby linking Marsh's scarab with the natural creature, which is not to minimise the novel's focus on a character embodying the emblematic insect of rebirth and how this makes it culturally sympathetic to the ancient polytheistic religion of Egypt.

This chapter opened by suggesting the Beetle may on occasion perform the sympathetic role of physician, drawing on evidence garnered from Ancient Egyptian medical papyri and Marsh's text. It discussed how scarabs in late-Victorian popular fiction are informed by the blended concerns of Egyptology and Egyptomania. It then showed these sacred insects co-existing in the Egyptian Gothic with death-defying oriental figures, a trope developed by: Haggard, Egyptological collector and traveller; Corelli, proponent of Eastern mysticism; Boothby, Anglo-Australian yarn-spinner and traveller through Egypt; and Stoker, scholastic researcher and theatre manager. Marsh, ex-jailbird and self-reinventor establishes so close a connection between defiance of death and the scarab, he embodies it in the same entity. My next chapter will develop the idea the Beetle is not merely the supernatural insect sibling of Ayesha, Ziska, and Tera. More precisely she is their sister.

### Chapter Three

#### Sex, Wickedness, and the Granting or Withholding of Sympathy

The first chapter announced my interpretation of the Beetle as female, and in it I demonstrated how this increases the degree of her subalternity and monstrosity, as well as according with the Orientalist feminisation of the east by the imperial west. The second chapter compared *The Beetle* with ancient physicians and with contemporaneous examples of Egyptian Gothic, particularly those that feature a strong, female, central character. This chapter delves deeper into the Beetle's self-identification as female; into late-nineteenth century, anthropological stereotyping of women; and into male mimicry influencing assessment of her gender. It assesses the significance of her femaleness on the generation of emotional responses including her own self-pity. Expanding on the concept of a western, racially constructed interpretation of character through physiognomy, it explores whether it is valid to attribute evil to the foreign, insect shapeshifter if antipathetic moral judgement is dictated by Eurocentrism, misogyny, and anthropomorphic perceptions of outer ugliness. Arguments put forward for the shapeshifter's female sex are textual, mythological, cultural-historical, and entomological.

Rosi Braidotti's 'Met(r)amorphoses: becoming Woman/Animal/Insect', speaks of 'the potency and endurance of sexual difference against the trends that aim at gender neutrality or sexual indifferentiation'.<sup>1</sup> My contention is that the female sex of the Beetle has been somewhat overlooked as a powerful authorial device in the manipulation of reader reaction. It is more pitiable if the Egyptian is a woman, since to be female is to arouse a modicum of pity for her plight that may otherwise be withheld. It is more damning if the Egyptian is a woman, since to be female is to be open to reductive condemnation as a wanton temptress, as hysterically vindictive, and as ugly. It is more frightening if the scarab is 'she' not 'it', since to be a female

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<sup>1</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Met(r)amorphoses: becoming Woman/Animal/Insect', in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 117-71 (pp. 169-70).

insect is to increase the threat linked to breeding potential. For the Beetle to be female is to stimulate a slightly enhanced sympathetic response, but, almost overwhelmingly, to be female is to heighten the feeling of antipathy.

### Sex and the Beetle

Nina Auerbach in *Woman and the Demon* identifies a Victorian stereotyping of women into a triad of pairs: 'victim and queen; domestic angel and demonic outcast; old maid and fallen woman.'<sup>2</sup> Old maid in Auerbach's analysis is an unmarried woman who has a 'wish for wings', and in the case of the Beetle the wish is granted in a literal sense.<sup>3</sup> These 'myths of womanhood' Auerbach finds flourishing 'in the vibrant half-life of popular literature and art', and she notes there is 'incessant interfusion' among them.<sup>4</sup> Marsh's Beetle is subaltern victim and potent monstrous queen, demonic outcast, unwed and fallen. Only the domestic angelic element is lacking in her – unless it be serving Lessingham with drugged drinks in Cairo or allowing hapless Holt to help himself to her larder – and for some, this may contribute to her lack of emotional appeal.

On the whole, the Beetle is commandingly assertive, even dictatorial, and if vulnerability arouses sympathy, she rarely demonstrates any. There are, however, one or two displays of passivity that occur in her overawed reaction to Atherton's superior scientific technology, and, more contentiously, immediately preceding her transformation into a 'noxious insect' when she is being strangled. My opening chapter maintained it is the man's act of violence which makes the monster, and Auerbach's observation of the *fin-de-siècle* female victim supports that view.

In a key tableau from the 1890s an apparently slain and supine heroine seems helpless before the controlling male who would dismember her; but like the myth of womanhood itself, our slain heroine restores

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<sup>2</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1982), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Auerbach, Chapter IV: 'Old Maids and the Wish for Wings', in *Woman and the Demon*, pp.109-49.

<sup>4</sup> Auerbach, pp. 10, 63.

herself to appropriate the powers of the destroying male. In this myth of transformations, the victim changes into the demon.<sup>5</sup>

Auerbach goes on to comment: '[e]ncompassing fantasy and facticity, these disparate genres concur in their mythic apprehension of woman's special powers, which declare themselves most memorably when they erupt in sudden magical transformations'.<sup>6</sup> The genres to which she is referring are representational art, prose non-fiction and Gothic romances. Marsh's Gothic horror revolves around the Beetle, and when she changes species in the face of the threat from the male would-be destroyer, Lessingham, she is harnessing what Auerbach terms the 'female capacity for metamorphosis'.<sup>7</sup> Her transformational skill, quintessentially linked to being a woman and epitomised in the metamorphic life cycle of the insect combines in her monstrous body as a prime example of what Auerbach calls: 'the deliberate freakishness of nineties imagery'.<sup>8</sup> She is created by Marsh as neither a shapeshifter occasionally choosing to be female as one option in a fluctuating sexual spectrum nor a creature incidentally female, where sex is irrelevant and she may as well be neuter. The Beetle is female, and, in many respects, archetypally so.

The way the Beetle recognises herself is as female. Early in the novel at a rare moment of emotional outpouring to Holt, she revealingly speaks of herself in the third person singular using the feminine pronoun. 'Her whom he has taken to his bosom he would put away from him as if she had never been'.<sup>9</sup> Had Marsh made her adopt the first person there could have been room for ambiguity, but there is none. The Beetle's conception of herself is as an abandoned woman, and this is how the character demands to be understood. By self-definition she is female, and there is nothing to indicate she was born anything other than biologically female. She lived as a female

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<sup>5</sup> Auerbach, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Auerbach, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Auerbach, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Auerbach, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 31.

in Egypt, warranting Lessingham with whom she was copulating to think of her by the gender-specific nickname of the 'Woman of the Songs'. If his story told to Champnell has any foundation in fact, Lessingham judges her supposed participation in the despoiling of white women at the Temple of Isis all the more heinous because it marks her as unnaturally devoid of sympathy for her own sex.

On the point of death, she is reborn as a scarab, but there is no evidence with a change of species comes a loss of female identity or a refusal of beetle binaries.<sup>10</sup> It is an entomological truism that male and female coleoptera are differentiated by the morphology of their genitalia and reproductive function. Females are equipped with ovaries and ovipositor. Sex determination is dimorphic, occurring in one of two distinct forms, therefore, as a beetle, the Beetle must be either male or female.<sup>11</sup> Confusion as to the sex of scarabs dates back thousands of years due to the ancient Egyptians having been, in the words of Ward and Griffith, 'poor entomologists'.<sup>12</sup> The Beetle is the embodiment of Khepri, the god of rebirth, conceptualised as male by a people unaware only females lay eggs in the dung in which coprophagous larvae hatch and pupate. The same erroneous view of scarab maleness is expressed by Plutarch:

The race of beetles has no female, but all the males eject their sperm into a round pellet of material which they roll up by pushing it from the opposite side, just as the sun seems to turn the heavens.<sup>13</sup>

Georg Ebers, eminent Egyptologist, papyrus purchaser and Egyptian romance writer mocks the ancient Egyptians' ignorance in his novel *Uarda* (1877) by including a conversation between Nebsecht the physician and Pentaur the priest scribe in which

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<sup>10</sup> Helen K. Salz, 'Sex Determination in Insects: A Binary Decision Based on Alternative Splicing', *Current Opinion in Genetics and Development*, 21.4 (2011), 395-400.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Simmons and Garcia-Gonzalez cited in Marlene Zuk, *Sex on Six Legs* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), pp. 114-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ward and Griffith, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch, 'Isis and Osiris', in *Moralia* V (Loeb Classical Library, 1936)

<[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis\\_and\\_Osiris\\*/E.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/E.html)> [accessed 29 June 2021].

the medical man corrects the religious man as to the nature of beetles. Pentaur pontificates:

the scarabaeus, 'which enters life as its own son' reminds us of the ever self-renewing creative power which causes you to call our merciful and benevolent God a monster, but which you can deny as little as you can the happy choice of the type; for, as you know, there are only male scarabei, and this animal reproduces itself.<sup>14</sup>

Nebsecht smiles and counters superstition with science.

If all the doctrines of the mysteries [...] have no more truth than this happily chosen image, they are in a bad way. These beetles have for years been my friends and companions. I know their family life, and I can assure you that there are males and females amongst them as amongst cats, apes, and human beings.<sup>15</sup>

Victorian readers were able to learn the truth about scarab sexes from popular fiction without needing to be expert entomologists, though they could of course also access the information in populist books on insects such as those of the Rev J. G. Wood.<sup>16</sup> Budge comments in *The Mummy*: 'Latreille thinks that the belief that one sex only existed among scarabaei arose from the fact that the females are exceedingly like the males'.<sup>17</sup> Pierre André Latreille (1762-1833) was the foremost entomologist of his time, studying and writing extensively about the reproductive functions of insects. Atherton is familiar with his work. In *The Sacred Beetle*, leading nineteenth and early twentieth-century entomologist Jean Henri Fabre (1823-1915) excuses the untutored ancient Egyptians' sexual misidentification of beetles on the grounds males and females are outwardly indistinguishable from one another, unless inspected at

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<sup>14</sup> Georg Ebers, *Uarda: A Romance of Ancient Egypt* [1877], trans. by Clara Bell (New York: W. S. Gottsberger, 1880), p. 178.

<sup>15</sup> Ebers, *Uarda*, p.178.

<sup>16</sup> New editions in 1883 and 1892 stand as evidence for the enduring popularity of Wood's *Insects Abroad*. See Rev. A. G. Wood, *Insects Abroad* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892).

<sup>17</sup> Budge, *Mummy*, p. 233.

very close quarters with the aid of magnification.<sup>18</sup> Marsh effectively reverses Khepri's maleness and magnifies the Beetle by virtue of her enormous size, so her sex can be correctly identified by an entomologist who knows what to look for, and that person is Atherton.

Before addressing Atherton's assessment of coleopteran sex, I shall first set out evidence as to why the Beetle's body shapeshifts between the exoskeletal and the fleshly but should be understood as a body consistently female. With mythological plausibility Marsh merges aspects of Khepri and Isis to create a character of two species in one supernatural entity. The Beetle is a worshipper of Isis, the fundamental feminine, controller of the natural world, in whom can be identified aspects of the primordial earth mother. Even Darwin in *The Origin of Species* persistently personifies Nature as 'She'. As mother of Horus, the son of Ra, Isis faintly foreshadows the Virgin Mary, the epitome of motherhood. Priestly attendants on Isis numbered men and women, but the Cairene devotees with whom Paul Lessingham becomes most closely entangled are female. When the strangled 'Woman of the Songs' transforms into the Beetle in an act of self-preservation or resurrection, there is potential for mythological gender conflict as she acquires attributes of the major female deity with whom she has strong religious affiliations, and the minor insect god of rebirth, inaccurately imagined as male. Given the Beetle is operating within a belief system that worships a pantheon of Egyptian gods who manifest as human or animal or a hybrid combination of both, the transition from human to insect verges on the unproblematic. Physically, in zoological species, the Beetle's altered form resembles Khepri, but in the competition to determine the sex of her coleopterous corpus, which must after all fall into one or other beetle binary, the superior powerful female deity, Isis inevitably dominates. If the Beetle's insect sex is female, and if by her own definition her human sex is female, there is no option but to treat her as female.

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<sup>18</sup> J. Henri Fabre, *The Sacred Beetle and Others*, trans. by Alexander Teixeira De Mattos (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 41. This posthumous translation gathers several of Fabre's earlier essays on beetles.



To be female is significant when taken in the context of *fin-de-siècle* theories on transgressive women exemplified in, for instance, *The Female Offender*, an influential work translated into English in 1895 and co-written by the physician, Cesare Lombroso and his son-in-law, William Ferrero. Within the pages of *The Female Offender*, vengefulness and sexual jealousy are identified as traits prevalent in women, and both are strongly present in the Beetle. Lombroso and Ferrero note: 'As a general thing the female born criminal is far less rapid in her vengeance than the man [...] Revenge in her case follows after days, months, or even years.'<sup>19</sup> Delayed female revenge exactly fits the profile of the Beetle who waits two decades to pursue Lessingham to London. The extent of her revenge is likewise stereotypical.

And women are big children; their evil tendencies are more numerous and more varied than men's, [...] When they are awakened and excited they produce results proportionately greater [...] Naturally these sentiments of hatred are most ferocious when excited by an offence to the feelings which are strongest in women and represent their worst passions. If sexuality comes to complicate jealousy and vengeance these manifest themselves under a more terrible aspect than usual.<sup>20</sup>

Lombroso and Ferrero echo Nicholas Francis Cooke's observation on women in *Satan in Society*.

The temperament of woman exposes her to the most singular inconveniences and inconsistencies. Extreme in good she is also extreme in evil. [...] She passes from hate to love with prodigious facility [...] Capable of the most heroic actions, she does not shrink from the most atrocious crimes. [Women] are more merciless, more bloodthirsty than men.<sup>21</sup>

Cooke, Lombroso and Ferrero repeatedly apply the word 'evil' to women, finding in them 'an excessive desire for revenge, cunning, cruelty, [...] a combination of evil

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<sup>19</sup> Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), p. 155.

<sup>20</sup> Lombroso and Ferrero, pp. 151, 157.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Francis Cooke aka "A Physician", *Satan in Society* [1870] (Cincinnati: C. F. Vent, 1876), pp. 280-81.

tendencies which often results in a type of extraordinary wickedness.’<sup>22</sup> *The Female Offender* illuminates ways women were being represented in scientific discourse of the late nineteenth century, and Marsh manipulates reductive views expressed in criminological and anthropological works such as this to mould a central character who fits the bill of the female criminal type.

My thesis’ assertion the Beetle is female is not shared by all Marsh critics. Roger Luckhurst in ‘Trance Gothic’ describes the shapeshifter as a ‘liminal man-woman-goddess-beetle-Thing’, and this comment made in the year 2000 continues to be much quoted.<sup>23</sup> It is seized upon by amongst others, Elizabeth Effinger and Graeme Pedlingham, although Pedlingham, in the main, prefers his own ‘Beetle-creature’, and concentrates on positioning ‘it’ as a transformational object.<sup>24</sup> Pedlingham explicitly applies ‘Thing’ in the sense used by Bill Brown, citing Luckhurst’s definition in ‘Trance Gothic’ as one which ‘captures this sense of the creature as an assortment of particularities which ultimately collapse into generality’.<sup>25</sup> I query the inclusion of ‘man’ on Luckhurst’s hyphenated list, unless intended to refer to obfuscating, masculine-gendered presentation by the Beetle, and propose the substitution of ‘priestess’ for ‘goddess’, since the Beetle does not share either Isis’s or Khepri’s status as a deity. Ailise Bulfin’s wording of ‘vaguely defined demonic priestess-scarab entity’ and Shuhita Bhattacharjee’s ‘colonial priestess-idol-insect figure’ are closer to my interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

In his essay on ‘Marsh and the Female Offender’, Johan Höglund approaches the author via Lombroso and Ferrero, and, when discussing the Beetle, uses the feminine suffix twice in one paragraph, referring to her as an Egyptian ‘sorceress’.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lombroso and Ferrero, pp. 187-88.

<sup>23</sup> Luckhurst, ‘Trance Gothic’, p. 160.

<sup>24</sup> Effinger, ‘Insect Politics’; Graeme Pedlingham, ‘Something was going from me—the capacity, as it were, to be myself’: ‘Transformational Objects’, in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp. 171-89.

<sup>25</sup> Pedlingham, p. 183.

<sup>26</sup> Ailise Bulfin, ‘Situating *The Beetle*’ pp. 127-47; Bhattacharjee, “‘Not a muscle at my command’”.

<sup>27</sup> Johan Höglund, ‘Mrs Musgrave’s Stain of Madness: Marsh and the Female Offender’, in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp. 45-62 (p. 49).

Even though he finds her sexuality to be 'uncertain', he patently has certainty as to her sex. Her gender is fluid in the way it is presented by the author, performed by the character, and the way it is perceived. When gendered presentation, performance and perception is separated from sex, the species mutability demonstrated by the Beetle is, in accordance with Auerbach's hypothesis, a skill inherently female.

In *The Gothic Body*, Kelly Hurley describes Marsh's supernatural scarab as a 'Beetle-Woman'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Hurley's engagement with Marsh's novel is chiefly informed by heterosexual binaries as evidenced in her respective chapters on 'Uncanny Female Interiors' and 'Abjected Masculinities'.<sup>29</sup> She paves the way for her analysis of Marsh's 'Beetle-Woman' by drawing on near contemporaneous texts, one of which is Arthur Machen's short story, 'The Inmost Light' (1894), in which beautiful, angelic, Mrs Black is experimented on by her coercive husband in the grip of a weird obsession. He uses on her an unholy combination of science and the occult to rob her of her soul: it fundamentally alters her, rendering her a taxonomically blurred abomination so abhorrently ugly she cannot be looked upon, however her sexual identity remains uncompromisingly clear. Hurley notes she is transformed into 'a monstrosity unrecognizable as either a human being or a "lower animal": — but which retains a definitive identity as female'.<sup>30</sup>

Another of Machen's 1894 female 'monsters', sometimes paired with Agnes Black in the same bound volume, is Helen Vaughan of *The Great God Pan*, a demonic succubus, a sexually all-consuming woman, though on the point of death, rapid gender and species shifting occurs: 'changing and melting beyond your eyes from woman to man, from man to beast, and from beast to worse than beast'.<sup>31</sup> Agnes

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<sup>28</sup> Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996). Hurley first puts forward this view in ' "The Inner Chambers of All Nameless Sin": *The Beetle*, Gothic Female Sexuality and Oriental Barbarism', in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature* ed. by Lloyd Davis (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 193-213.

<sup>29</sup> Hurley, *Gothic Body*, Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>30</sup> Hurley, *Gothic Body*, p. 118.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan* (London: John Lane, 1894), p. 77.

Black and Helen Vaughan along with Rider Haggard's Ayesha, even when no longer fully human, are understood to be female and are explicitly referred to as such by Margree, Orrells and Vuohelainen: 'dangerous and fascinating women [who] metamorphose before horrified male eyes into organisms from the evolutionary past'.<sup>32</sup> If an insect is taken to be a more primitive life-form, surely there are strong analogies with the Beetle.

Hurley's analysis of *fin-de-siècle* female monsters stretches into the early twentieth century with Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911). She bypasses Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897) even though it was published within three years of Machen's tales and, like Marsh's exactly contemporaneous text, addresses the tendency of xenophobia to preclude sympathy. Hurley establishes female monsters are by no means a rarity for their period, and it is not unreasonable to place Marsh's Beetle-Woman amongst them, especially considering Hurley's definition of the Beetle according to female sexual parts: 'an emasculating and abject embodiment of her genitalia'.<sup>33</sup> Vuohelainen does not go so far as to liken the Beetle to a voracious vagina, but in her consideration of Judith Lee, Marsh's lip-reading lady detective skilled in martial arts, she comments how Lee recalls 'the alterity of Marsh's most famous *female* character, the Beetle' [my emphasis].<sup>34</sup>

On all but one occasion the transmigration from human to insect takes place when the lights are out, in darkness that is often pitch black. Luckhurst refers to the fact Holt 'witnesses – or hallucinates – something profoundly traumatic: the transformation of this man-woman-thing into a gigantic beetle'.<sup>35</sup> Luckhurst's

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<sup>32</sup> Victoria Margree, Daniel Orrells and Minna Vuohelainen, 'Introduction', in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp.1-26 (p. 13).

<sup>33</sup> Hurley, *Gothic Body*, p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, 'The Most Dangerous Thing in England', in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp. 63-86 (p. 68). Additional examples of critics discussing the femaleness of the Beetle are Hurley, 'Inner Chambers' 194, 203; Garnet, 'Dracula and the Beetle', pp. 40-43; and Judith Halberstam, 'Gothic Nation: The Beetle by Richard Marsh,' in *Fictions of Unease: The Gothic from "Otranto" to "The X-Files"*, ed. by Andrew Smith, Diane Mason and William Hughes (Bath: Sulis Press, 2002), 100, 105-09, 112-14.

<sup>35</sup> Luckhurst, *Mummy's Curse: Dark Fantasy*, p. 172.

comment in *The Mummy's Curse*, where he retains the man-woman oxymoron of his earlier hyphenated list, cannot be presumed to imply the luckless clerk 'witnesses' using his eyes. Holt's experience of the bodily change in the Egyptian is polysensorious, but vision plays a negligible part. Holt does not know what to make of the creature he hears, smells, feels, and, when she inserts part of herself into his mouth, presumably tastes. What he does not do is see her, except for her glowing eyes.

Just as Holt's haptic sense initially misleads him into thinking the creature is a spider, so, as soon as the lights come on, his optic sense betrays him into thinking the person in the bed is a man. He assumes this because he is skeptical such preternatural ugliness could belong to a woman: 'I knew it to be a man,—for this reason, if for no other, that it was impossible such a creature could be feminine'.<sup>36</sup> His logic is flawed. Tim Youngs comments on Holt's assumption in *Beastly Journeys*: '[h]is conclusion is not supported by the other characters in the novel or by the narrative itself'.<sup>37</sup> Holt then makes a reassessment:

about the face there was something which was essentially feminine; so feminine indeed that I wondered if I could by any possibility have blundered, and mistaken a woman for a man; some ghoulis example of her sex, who had so yielded to her depraved instincts as to have become nothing but a ghastly reminiscence of womanhood.<sup>38</sup>

When Atherton subsequently questions him about whether he thought the Beetle was a woman. Holt reaffirms he did. 'I did think so, more than once. Though I can hardly explain what made me think so. There was certainly nothing womanly about the face [...] I suppose it was a question of instinct'.<sup>39</sup> The psychic link she establishes with him overrides human rationalism which might deduce sex based on a western-

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<sup>36</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Tim Youngs, *Beastly Journeys* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013), p. 88. Marsh teases his readers by calling this chapter 'The Man in the Bed', *Beetle*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>38</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 181.

informed judgement of aesthetic appearance. He relies instead on animal 'instinct' and finds her female.

Margree questions Hurley's assertion the Beetle is 'essentially female' on the grounds her argument underplays the significance of the 'homoerotic potential' of the early scenes with Holt and the Beetle.<sup>40</sup> Effinger goes even further and reads it as an 'ejaculatory scene [...] hyper-phallic', which references a tradition stretching as far back as Marie De France's twelfth-century fables of 'queer beetles [where] the beetle wreaks havoc by anally penetrating its victim.'<sup>41</sup> Effinger views *The Beetle* within a 'sticky web' of 'agricultural, social and gender politics', in which the marginalised and abjected Beetle critiques and violates political institutions, embodying, not so much the colonial subject as I have argued, but 'the threatening alterity of the insect or woman to the polis'.<sup>42</sup> Later in 'Insect Politics', Effinger presents the Beetle as 'the outward appearance of the ugliness and horrors found within the deceptively smooth-faced [male] politicians', in seeming contradiction to her view of the Beetle expressed before and after it in the same essay, where she envisages the Beetle as 'the face of political *woman*' [my emphasis].<sup>43</sup> Leslie Allin agrees with Effinger about the physical encounters being sexual assault, but Allin considers Holt's predicament to be 'the threat of female envelopment'.<sup>44</sup> Bhattacharjee views the assault as 'woman-on-man rape', as does Syperrek, who describes the 'occurrence of female-on-

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<sup>40</sup> Victoria Margree, ' "Both in Men's Clothing": Gender, Sovereignty and Insecurity in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', *Critical Survey*, 19.2 (2007), 63-81 (p. 80); footnote xiv.

<sup>41</sup> Effinger, 'Insect Politics' p. 258. Effinger refers to two fables in particular, 'The Peasant and the Beetle' and 'The Wolf and the Beetle' by Marie De France, *Fables*, ed. and trans. by Harriet Spiegel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Effinger, pp. 252, 265.

<sup>43</sup> Effinger, pp. 262, 265.

<sup>44</sup> Leslie Allin, 'Leaky bodies: Masculinity, Narrative and Imperial Decay in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', *Victorian Network*, 6.1 (2015), 113-35 (p. 118). Allin refers to Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), in which Theweleit identifies a male defensive strategy of stiffening or freezing in response to the grotesque feminine.

male rape suggested at several points in the story'.<sup>45</sup> Holt is attacked by an arthropod he mis-identifies as a spider and quizzed by a person he mis-identifies as a man, which could be said to typify or even be a root cause of confusions within the critical field as to the Beetle's species and sex.

In the novel itself, an alternative queer event to the supposed male-on-male assault of Book I is offered in Book III when the Beetle infiltrates Marjorie Lindon's bed and subjects her to what could be interpreted as a lesbian deflowering. W. C. Harris and Dawn Vernooy, in 'Gender, Orientalism and the Queering of Violence', categorise *The Beetle* as a queer text, which of course does not rule out the possibility of a female Beetle.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, throughout their article, they consistently use the feminine pronoun, feminine possessive and feminine suffix whenever discussing the Beetle, whom they term 'the most dangerous and destructive female in the novel'.<sup>47</sup> They find male queerness in *The Beetle* to be expressed in the homosocial and implied homosexual relations between the European men, and female queerness in the 'nonnormatively feminine' New Woman.<sup>48</sup> Syperek also addresses the conflation of the supernatural scarab with the New Woman. She eventually comes down on the side of *The Beetle* being not a queer text, but a trans text, embodying 'jouissance' in breaking down social norms and breaching rigid taxonomic categorisation.<sup>49</sup> Syperek contrasts the fixed orderliness of the entomology cabinet with gender instability in

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<sup>45</sup> Shuhuta Bhattacharjee, 'The Colonial Idol, the Animalistic, and the New Woman in the Imperial Gothic of Richard Marsh', in *Gothic Animals: Uncanny Otherness and the Animal With-Out*, ed. by Ruth Heholt and Melissa Edmundson (Charm, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 241-56 (p. 152); Pandora Syperek, 'Gendered Metamorphoses', pp. 163-87 (p. 174).

<sup>46</sup> W. C. Harris and Dawn Vernooy, ' "Orgies of Nameless Horrors": Gender, Orientalism and the Queering of Violence in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* ', *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, 48.4 (2012), 339-81.

<sup>47</sup> Harris and Vernooy, 347.

<sup>48</sup> Harris and Vernooy, 361; Patricia Murphy, *The New Woman Gothic: Reconfigurations of Distress* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2016).

<sup>49</sup> Syperek, p. 168.

the 'villain'. Unfortunately, the opening two thirds of her essay, where she argues for the Beetle being female, tend to undermine her conclusion the creature is trans.<sup>50</sup>



Figure III:1

Edward Linley Sambourne

'Suffrage for Both Sexes'

© *Punch*

Suffrage societies had begun to spring up in the wake of John Stuart Mill's 1866 presentation to Parliament of the first mass petition on suffrage for women. In 1870, *Punch* conflated a beetle with the New Woman, and continued to blend the insect with women in future illustrations.<sup>51</sup> The cartoon in Figure III:1 shows a stag beetle, a species in which the secondary characteristic of the male is a pair of huge antlers, equipping them for physical combat. Here, those antlers are sported by a human female in an entomological borrowing that indicates the woman is ready for a fight. Syperrek also draws on *Punch* illustrations and identifies within Marsh's text 'chaotic foreign feminine menace [and] polarised personifications of femininity'.<sup>52</sup> Presumably she positions the Beetle at one end of the spectrum, Marjorie at the other, and the financially independent Dora Grayling somewhere in between. Syperrek's female polarisation is open to challenge since Marjorie, in her politicising, her defiance of

<sup>50</sup> The scope of this thesis does not allow for an extended engagement with Queer or Trans Studies, but see what Zigarovich describes as the 'remarkable influence' of Stryker's essays on *Frankenstein* and transsexuality. Jolene Zigarovich, 'The Trans Legacy of *Frankenstein*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 45.2 (July 2018), 260-72 (p. 260); Susan Stryker, 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1.3 (1994), 237-54. See also Lisa Hager, 'A Case for a Trans Studies Turn in Victorian Studies: "Female Husbands" of the Nineteenth Century', *Victorian Review*, 44.1 (Spring 2018), 37-54.

<sup>51</sup> S. Applebaum and T. Kelly, eds, *Great Drawings and Illustrations from Punch 1841-1901* (New York, 1891); *Punch* 58, 02 April 1870, p.128.

<sup>52</sup> Syperrek, p. 168.



patriarchal control, and adventurous urge to direct outcomes, is something of a New Woman herself. Marjorie, Dora, and the Beetle are a trio of female characters seeking fulfilment and who undergo change. Each presents a facet of the New Woman, who in Auerbach's terms is 'a powerful evolutionary type, harbinger of new worlds, new futures, and in her most radical implications, new forms of the human species'.<sup>53</sup>

Syperek's contemplation of the womanhood of the Beetle is inspired by Braidotti's 'women-insects nexus'.<sup>54</sup> Syperek finds the entomological element to be 'inherent in links with woman as monstrous Other', which she identifies as 'conflating the hairy abject insect with the *vagina dentata*, the symbolic fantasy of castrating female sexuality'.<sup>55</sup> The difficulty with her analogy is its use of the adjective 'hairy'. Although dung beetles have body hairs called setae, sensitive to light, sound, touch, smell, and taste, most prevalent on their ventral surface, they are not what non-specialists would think of as 'hairy', and Marsh never describes the Beetle as such.<sup>56</sup> Syperek presses on with her genital rhetoric. 'The monstrous human-size beetle is thus explicitly gendered female, standing upright with its legs out front, it is in effect a giant *vagina dentata*, a castrating feminine lack', and she follows this by introducing into her argument an entirely new insect species in the devouring female praying mantis.<sup>57</sup> While I applaud the insectile focus of her chapter, and welcome the metaphorical support for female sex, albeit alternated with the neuter pronoun, my concern is that during her avowedly entomological analysis of Marsh's novel, Syperek pays insufficient attention to the fact that his Beetle, when not manifesting as a human being, is a North African dung beetle.

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<sup>53</sup> Auerbach, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Syperek cites Braidotti in Syperek, pp. 150-52.

<sup>55</sup> Syperek, p. 169.

<sup>56</sup> Jurong Sun et al, 'Restudies on Body Surface of Dung Beetle and Application of its Bionics Flexible Technique, *Journal of Bionic Engineering*, 1 (2004), 53-60. There is a genus of hairy scarab occurring across southern Africa. See Renzo Perissinotto et al, 'Description of Adult and Third Instar Larva of *Trichostetha curlei* sp. n. (Coleoptera, Scarabaeidae, Cetoniinae) from the Cape region of South Africa', *Zookeys* 428 (23 July 2014), 41-56.

<sup>57</sup> Syperek, p. 170.

She comments on the mind controlling powers of the Beetle, and states: 'mesmerism is also suggestive of social insects such as ants and bees, whose shared intelligence provided a model for the study of uncanny mental states and the emerging study of psychology in the 1890s'.<sup>58</sup> It would be an incisive point were it not for the fact dung beetles are the opposite of eusocial. One of the species' key behavioural traits is that, apart from when mating, they tend to operate solo. As my introduction established, the driving force of this thesis is its interdisciplinary investigation into the sustained application of insect imagery in Marsh's Egyptian Gothic. An important critical parameter is entomological accuracy.

Within the novel, the character with entomological knowledge is Sydney Atherton, who also possesses a smattering of Egyptology, knowing enough to remember about 'that ancient scarab, which figures so largely in the still unravelled tangles of the Egyptian mythologies'.<sup>59</sup> When relating the incident of the apotheosis of the Beetle, Atherton speaks of his acquaintance with 'the legendary transmigrations of Isis, and with the story of the beetle, which issues from the woman's womb through all eternity'.<sup>60</sup> His uterine vocabulary reinforces the entanglement of the sacred scarab with Isis and an explicitly female reproductive system. The scientist envisages a literal and a symbolic womb sustaining ancient beliefs, and Syperrek seems to agree such beliefs are founded on what she asserts to be 'primordial feminine insectile superstition'.<sup>61</sup> The difficulty with her position is it sits uncomfortably with what she later alleges of the monstrous 'villain', that they 'adhere to neither heteronormativity nor homonormativity'.<sup>62</sup> Through this imposition of indeterminate sex upon the Beetle, Syperrek separates her from the pagan religion she practices and embodies. This thesis is not at loggerheads with itself. It maintains a clear and consistent line as to sex.

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<sup>58</sup> Syperrek, p. 165.

<sup>59</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 114.

<sup>60</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 116.

<sup>61</sup> Syperrek, p. 170.

<sup>62</sup> Syperrek, p. 179.

Syperek bolsters her position by calling upon Jolene Zigarovich's argument for the interdependence between the trans subject and the Gothic subject as a 'hybrid, fluid and unstable form'.<sup>63</sup> My contention is that the Beetle is a Gothic subject who shifts and alternates between comparatively stable forms regardless of any degree of species hybridity within those two forms, and that her sex is consistent.<sup>64</sup> Syperek utilises Lindsay Kelly's portmanteau word 'tranimal' to embody 'cross-gender/cross-species intersubjectivity troubling multiple "animacy hierarchies" [...] including of gender, sexuality, and phylum'.<sup>65</sup> Marsh's creature certainly embodies confusions of gender and sexuality, and she troubles the fixity of a single zoological phylum in shapeshifting between *Homo sapiens* and *Scarabaeus sacer*, but she is female as woman and/or beetle, a position I believe to be supported by her self-identification and by the incontrovertible textual evidence of Atherton's external assessment, which ought not to be peremptorily dismissed.

Ascertaining the sex of an insect or a human cannot be done in the dark, nor is it feasible to do it when they are covered in bedsheets or swathed in a burnoose, the traditional Arab dress invariably worn by the Beetle. The human Beetle has neither beard nor moustache to indicate maleness and so the strongest confirmation of sex would be for someone with knowledge of human anatomy and insect morphology to 'witness' the subject fully exposed with the lights on, the bright lights of the laboratory. And this is exactly what takes place in Book II of the novel when Atherton makes an identification of the Beetle in insect form as female.

Beyond doubt it was a lamellicorn, one of the *copridae*. With the one exception of its monstrous size, there were the characteristics in plain view;—the convex body, the large head, the projecting clypeus. More,

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<sup>63</sup> Jolene Zigarovich, 'Introduction: Transing the Gothic', in *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, ed. Jolene Zigarovich (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1-22 (p. 5).

<sup>64</sup> Mario Ortiz-Robles conceives of Marsh's 'monster' as a 'liminanimal' occupying 'a liminal zone between human and animal'. I envisage her shifting between those two states. Mario-Ortiz-Robles, 'Liminanimal: The Monster in Late Victorian Fiction', *European Journal of English Studies*, 19.1 (2015), 10-23 (p. 10).

<sup>65</sup> Syperek, p. 180; Lindsay Kelly, 'Tranimals', *TSQ: Trans Studies Quarterly* 1 (2014), 226-28.

its smooth head and throat seemed to suggest that it was a female [...] The colouring was superb [...] it scintillated.<sup>66</sup>

Atherton directly references the research of Latreille, after whom two dung beetles were named: the *Geotrupidae latreille*, and the *Scarabaeoida latreille*.<sup>67</sup> This lends credence to the theory Atherton speaks with some degree of authority on beetles and their sexual dimorphism. He views the Beetle in front of him with learned objectivity, makes an informed deduction as to sex, and proves his hypothesis when she resumes human form unencumbered by garments.<sup>68</sup> Doubtless sighting breasts and exposed genitalia, concentrating more on her naked body than her face, Atherton is compelled to go through a similar reassessment to Holt and pronounce the Beetle female:

in less time than no time, there stood in front of me, naked from top to toe, my truly versatile oriental friend. One startling fact nudity revealed,—that I had been egregiously mistaken on the question of sex. My visitor was not a man, but a woman, and, judging from the brief glimpse which I had of her body, by no means old or ill-shaped either.<sup>69</sup>

The Beetle demonstrates feminine modesty as she hastily pulls on her man's robes, yet, despite Atherton declaring her to be a female insect and female human, and confirming it to Lessingham — 'it appears she is a woman' —, he later incongruously accords her the personal pronoun 'he' and the possessive 'his'.<sup>70</sup> My first chapter speculated this is because he cannot reconcile her ancient Egyptian aspect which is gendered female with her modern Muslim aspect which he and other characters gender male, especially when female monstrosity is buried by the garb of Arab masculinity.

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<sup>66</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 117.

<sup>67</sup> For evidence of Atherton's knowledge of Latreille's work, see *The Beetle*, p. 78.

<sup>68</sup> Sexual dimorphism is where two sexes of an identical species exhibit differences in reproductive organs and in secondary characteristics such as visual appearance or behaviour. In beetles these are linked at a genetic level to sex; Cris Ledón-Rettig, 'What Dung Beetles Can Teach Us About Sexual Difference', *Smithsonian Magazine* (22 March 2017) <<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-dung-beetles-can-teach-us-sex-differences-180962622/>> [accessed 30 June 2021].

<sup>69</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 118.

<sup>70</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 149.

One explanation for the Beetle's outfit choice may be its function as camouflage, for a lone woman of colour to mimic the outward appearance of a man and avail herself of the greater freedoms associated with that gender presentation. Henry Bates, the nineteenth-century naturalist and entomologist, carried out extensive research into the evolutionary adaptations of insects to protect themselves from predators, and he found mimicry to be a significant defence mechanism.<sup>71</sup> The Beetle, sensing instinctively or knowing strategically what to do, mimics the less vulnerable male, making it easier to move with greater freedom through the white-European, late-Victorian city.

Margree notes: 'One of the rhetorical idiosyncrasies of the novel is the proliferation of the phrase, "playing the man" ', a comment arising chiefly from Margree's analysis of performed and deconstructed frail masculinity in Holt and Lessingham.<sup>72</sup>

So insistent is this vernacularism [playing the man] that I am tempted to read it as a much more generalised questioning of gender identity that is at work in the text and that is frequently manifested as a question over whether gender is an essential part of the self or whether it is something that is 'played' like a role, or worn like a garb.<sup>73</sup>

Margree's consideration of females donning men's clothing centres on Marjorie's identity as a New Woman, and nods obliquely towards semi-masculine 'rational dress', yet Margree does not extend the idea to the Beetle indulging in self-protective Batesian mimicry.

The Beetle strips Marjorie and forces her to put on ragged male attire to 'pass' for a man. As part of this process, she crops Marjorie's 'corn-hued' hair. Joseph Kestner in *Sherlock's Sisters* refers to this as 'symbolic rape', which, although he is not discussing *The Beetle*, may substantiate Marjorie having been sexually violated in

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<sup>71</sup> Henry Walter Bates (1825-1892) accompanied Alfred Russell Wallace to the Amazon Rainforest in 1848 and remained there for eleven years collecting specimens.

<sup>72</sup> Margree, 'Both in Men's Clothing', 8. Margree quotes *The Beetle* p. 49 and elsewhere.

<sup>73</sup> Margree, 'Both in Men's Clothing', 8-9.

Book II.<sup>74</sup> The removal of a key visual characteristic denoting her as feminine may also have a dual purpose. Long pale hair would have been a valuable black-market commodity for wigmakers, and the Beetle could have appropriated it and sold it, or else commissioned a hairpiece and even worn it herself in ghastly mimicry of Marjorie. In her haste to abduct the disguised woman, she is obliged to abandon her rival's 'silken tresses'.<sup>75</sup> For Marjorie, even with hacked-off hair, 'transformed into the image of a man', there is no implication from author or critics she is transformed into the body of a man.<sup>76</sup>

Eleanor Dobson's article 'Cross Dressing Scholars and Mummies in Drag' identifies the Egyptian trope of 'transvestism' in women, and in parallel analyses of *The Beetle* and *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, she notes how in Marsh's text: 'Ancient monster and modern woman are united; gender "worn like a garment" might not only be adopted or discarded, but imposed and endured'.<sup>77</sup> Addressing *The Jewel* she notes: 'to Stoker's original readers, Tera — and Hatchepsut — would have seemed to cross distinct gender lines in an assertion of masculinised female power, symbolised by sartorial choices'.<sup>78</sup> Dobson never extrapolates the same might hold true for the Beetle. Transformation of outer self in species and through clothing does not correlate to transformation of inner self in sex. Age, hatred, sadness, and the device of disguising herself as a man to survive in a strange city invariably rob the Beetle of femininity, and it is no doubt with grim satisfaction she imposes the same fate on

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective 1864-1913* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 210-11.

<sup>75</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 238.

<sup>76</sup> Margree, 'Both in Men's Clothing', 9.

<sup>77</sup> Eleanor Dobson, 'Cross -Dressing Scholars and Mummies in Drag: Egyptology and Queer Identity', *Aegyptiaca Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt* 4 (2018), 33-54 (p. 41). Female Pharaoh, Hatchepsut, inspiration for Tera, wore a ceremonial beard. Stryker finds transvestism an old-fashioned term indicating a 'vestimentary coding of gender' carried out episodically or primarily for sexual gratification', which she prefers to encompass under the umbrella 'transgender', Stryker, 'My Words', 251.

<sup>78</sup> Dobson, 'Cross-Dressing Scholars', 45. Dobson is thinking of the ceremonial false Pharaonic beard. See also Andrew Smith, 'Love, Freud, and the Female Gothic: Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*', *Gothic Studies*, 6 (2004), 86-87.

Lessingham's fiancée. The change in gender expression is external and non-corporeal. Private personal identity remains unaffected. Just because at various times Marjorie and the Beetle are '[b]oth in men's clothing' does not mean either of them become men.<sup>79</sup>

*The Female Offender* explicitly addresses the subject of vengeful women who masquerade as men. 'Sometimes the female offenders [...] take a strange pleasure in dressing themselves as men — like B., for instance, who assumed men's clothes when attempting her schemes of revenge on her husband's mistress'.<sup>80</sup> The 'B' which begins the name of the offending woman is a happy coincidence for this thesis, but, even were the Beetle to display virile characteristics in personality as well as dress, *The Female Offender* offers an explanation.

In general the moral physiognomy of the born female criminal approximates strongly to that of the male. The atavistic diminution of secondary sexual characters which is to be observed in the anthropology of the subject, shows itself once again in the psychology of the female criminal, who is excessively erotic, weak in maternal feeling, inclined to dissipation, astute and audacious, and dominates weaker beings sometimes by suggestion, at others by muscular force; while her love of violent exercise, her vices, and even her dress, increase her resemblance to the sterner sex.<sup>81</sup>

Marsh's creation exhibits many of the traits of the female criminal catalogued by Lombroso and Ferrero: lustfulness; mesmeric ability; physical strength greater than that of her victims; and at times she appears masculine psychically, physically and in clothing. It does not alter her state as a woman.

A sexually active woman in her mid to late thirties, as one might calculate the approximate age of the Beetle, could still be fit to carry a small number of pregnancies to full term. When she manifests as an insect, her biological female sex carries

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<sup>79</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 259.

<sup>80</sup> Lombroso and Ferrero, *Female Offender*, p. 246.

<sup>81</sup> Lombroso and Ferrero, p. 187.

reproductive implications for any readers unschooled in beetle breeding cycles in terms of volume and rapidity. They might suppose her to be capable of releasing a significant number of fertilised eggs, which as adults could themselves produce multiple progeny. The potential for an exponential increase in Egyptian insects is hinted at within the text in the Oriental carpet in the Beetle's lair, visually reinforced in John Williamson's frontispiece to Skeffington's first edition. A detail of the image in Figure III:2 clearly depicts the rug. When Marjorie Lindon treads on it, she discovers its pattern to be one of horrifically lifelike, enlarged scarabs.



Figure III:2

Detail: John Williamson: Frontispiece to *The Beetle* (London: Skeffington, 1897)

On the floor there was a marvellous carpet, which was apparently of eastern manufacture [...] It was woven in gorgeous colours, and covered with – [...]

It was covered with beetles!

All over it, with only a few inches of space between each, were representations of some peculiar kind of beetle,—it was the same beetle, over, and over, and over. The artist had woven his undesirable subject into the warp and woof of the material with such cunning skill that, as one continued to gaze, one began to wonder if by any possibility the creatures could be alive.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 198-99.



Rosi Braidotti notes the reproductive ability of insects is characterised by superfluity and 'hyper-active sexuality, with highly accelerated rhythms'.<sup>83</sup> A female insect carries the potential for infestation in the way a male does not. What many do repeatedly, and do quickly, is produce new versions of themselves 'over, and over, and over'. In a work of late-Victorian popular fiction, latent xenophobia and false entomological assumptions might suggest an interpretation of the foreign Beetle as a prolific breeder who heralds an invasive force of pestilential proportions. It is incorrect. The *Scarabaeus sacer* does not lay a large clutch of eggs at a time. Usually, she lays a single one, and, according to J. Henri Fabre, a typical successful female only lays an average of half a dozen eggs in her lifetime and a less successful individual even fewer than that. Unless Marsh's readers were aware of this finer point of entomology, the Beetle's female sex infers a threat far greater than if her author had made her male.

Apart from being a female of enormous size, Atherton notices nothing anomalous in the scarab, which can reasonably be presumed to have six legs, mandibles, an exoskeleton, and an inscrutable face. In unreadability lies much of her inability to generate sympathy. The affective response to the Beetle can be illuminated through counterfactualism, defined by Jeremy Black and Donald MacRaid as 'the idea of conjecturing on what did not happen, or what might have happened, in order to understand what did happen'.<sup>84</sup> I view Marsh's novel in the counterfactual light of *Sympathy*, a painting by popular artist, Briton Rivière (1840-1920), and I conjecture what might have happened if an attractive female dog were replaced by a female scarab.

*Sympathy* was first exhibited at The Royal Academy in 1878 and presented by Sir Henry Tate to the Tate in 1897, the year of the gallery's opening, Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, and the release of *The Beetle*. Rivière was renowned for visual

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<sup>83</sup> Braidotti, p. 153.

<sup>84</sup> Jeremy Black & Donald M. MacRaid, *Studying History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 125.

portrayals of dogs and humans interacting in a friendly manner.<sup>85</sup> He was also the artist responsible for the illustrations in Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, an example of which is 'Dog in a humble and affectionate state of mind'.<sup>86</sup> Darwin notes how canine bodily positioning and changes to the dog's features exhibit liking and sympathy. 'The ears fall down and are drawn somewhat backwards, which causes the eyelids to be elongated, and alters the whole appearance of the face. The lips hang loosely, and the hair remains smooth'.<sup>87</sup> Rivière's *Sympathy* reproduced in Figure III:3 shows a dog in this identical pose.<sup>88</sup>



Figure III:3

Briton Rivière, *Sympathy* (1877)

Oil paint on canvas, 121.8 x 101.5 cm.

Royal Holloway Collection, Egham.

Ironically, in the very paintwork of the child's complexion may be embedded insect remains, since carmine and lake pigment obtained from cochineal 'beetles'

<sup>85</sup> Examples are Briton Rivière, *His Only Friend* (1871), Tate, London; *Cupboard Love* (1881), The New Art Gallery, Walsall; *Mother Hubbard* (1882), Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums.

<sup>86</sup> Darwin, *Expression of the Emotions*, p. 53.

<sup>87</sup> Darwin, *Expression of the Emotions*, p. 118.

<sup>88</sup> Briton Rivière, *Sympathy* (1877), oil paint on canvas, Royal Holloway Collection, Egham.

were used throughout the nineteenth century and beyond for reds and pinks.<sup>89</sup> Any ladies viewing the painting while wearing a dusting of powder on their face or bosom, or a dab of balm on their lips, would similarly be tinted with crushed bugs. Cochineal was a key ingredient in cosmetics, and a mid-Victorian aficionado comments upon its unique advantages.<sup>90</sup>

Carmine is much employed in the fashionable world by ladies as a skin cosmetic [...] It is the only substance capable of imparting the apparently true ruddiness of health to the portrait, or the bloom of the rose to the artificial flower.<sup>91</sup>

Viewers contemplating a bug-tinted artwork might be unaware of being dusted in insect derivatives themselves.

Through the medium of oil on canvas and pigment in paint, Rivière depicts a fair-skinned girl of approximately eight years of age, seated on the stairs slightly off centre of the painting. Her head rests on the palm of her hand, her mouth is downturned. Beside her a pale-coated dog is seated. Its face occupies the horizontal mid-point where the extension of the lines drawn by the girl's upper arm and its own spine intersect. The dog's importance is reinforced by the pattern on the carpet at the bottom of the painting. It forms an arrow pointing to the canine body. The dog's long ears are folded back so those differentiating animalistic features are understated to minimise species divisions and facilitate a physical and psychic connection between

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<sup>89</sup> See Jo Kirby, Monika Spring and Catherine Higgitt, 'The Technology of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Red Lake Pigments', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 28 (2007), 69-95; Amy Butler Greenfield, 'The Bug that had the World Seeing Red', *Smarthistory* (September 15, 2019) <<https://smarthistory.org/cochineal/>> [accessed 21 September 2021]. Optical microscopy Analysis revealed widespread presence of cochineal in multiple paintings at the National Gallery. Carminic acid used by J.M.W. Turner among others is a predator-deterrent produced by scale bugs (*Dactylopius coccus*), which are dried and ground to make pigment. Scale bugs are in fact of the order Hemiptera, though popularly referred to as beetles.

<sup>90</sup> Ruth Goodman, *How to be a Victorian* (London: Penguin, 2013); R. S. Fleming, 'Victorian Make-Up Recipes: Powders, Lip Salves, Creams & Other Cosmetics of the 1800s', <<http://www.katetattersall.com/victorian-cosmetic-recipes-powders-lip-salves-creams-other-make-up-of-the-1800s/>> [accessed 30 June 2021].

<sup>91</sup> Anon, *By a Practical Chemist: Member of Several Scientific Societies* (London: John Churchill, 1841), quoted in Fleming, 'Victorian Make-Up'.

the despondent human and the animal. The dog leans into the girl with its head on her shoulder, its face tilted in the same direction as hers, and its mouth downturned like hers. Their legs are both slightly parted, and the absence of obvious genitalia in the dog reveal she too is female. Visibly the animal shares the girl's gender and emotion. Dijkstra's discussion on the 'Call of the Child' in *fin-de-siècle* art identifies incipient womanly lubricity in multiple images of young girls clothed or not, and when he turns his focus to 'Connoisseurs of Bestiality', Dijkstra finds highly suggestive elements in depictions of females and their dogs, but he explicitly exempts Rivière from the artistic narrative of *double entendre*.<sup>92</sup> There is no codified sexuality in Rivière's painting of the young girl and her canine companion. What exists between the two figures is uncomplicated sympathy.

My beetle-focused thesis discusses a painting of a dog to imagine how the emotional affect would be entirely other if an insect were to be resting its head on the child's shoulder instead. A normally sized bug could not measure up to the girl physically or psychically nor could it dominate the canvas, no matter how many lines pointed to it or how centrally positioned it might be. Within the confines of the imagined painting, the girl might be unaware of the insect's small presence, unable to detect the infinitesimal weight of its six legs through the material of her dress. Fellow feeling would be lacking spiritually and tactilely. If, however, a much-enlarged insect pressed itself up against the child, she would certainly feel it then. Even if it were to fold back its antennae and point its mandibles downwards in a visual echo of her human physiognomy, the emotion evoked would very probably be horror.

Geneticist and biologist J. B. S Haldane expressed a wish for his portrait to contain himself and an enlarged insect: 'one of the small insects with which I work, represented as being, say, three feet long, and painted as carefully as an angel or a devil. They are in my opinion extremely beautiful creatures.'<sup>93</sup> Haldane is famously,

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<sup>92</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), pp. 185-97; pp. 297-301.

<sup>93</sup> J. B. S. Haldane, *What is Life?* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1949), p. 256.

perhaps apocryphally, credited with the anecdotal inference that the Creator must have had ‘an inordinate fondness for beetles.’<sup>94</sup> Writing in the mid-twentieth century from a scientific perspective, his conception of an aesthetically appealing, enlarged invertebrate alongside him in a painting constitutes a very different view from the one I propose by way of imagined Rivière adaptation. No vulnerable human subject might be supposed capable of remaining still on the soft golden carpet with such a noxious insect neighbour, unless they were a keen entomologist like Haldane or paralysed by catatonic dread like Holt or Marjorie. Rivière never did paint such a subject and the art viewing public was soothed by the sight of companion species in sympathy, not unsettled by a coleopterous monster. The reading public of Richard Marsh was not so spared.

Marsh’s Beetle inhabits the cultural environment of what Steven Connor in *The Book of Skin* calls the ‘Yellow Decade of the 1890s’.<sup>95</sup> It was a time when the non-western foreigner was routinely conceived of in terms of inscrutability, hence the racist-inflected usefulness of the unintelligible face of the insect as a metaphor for the ‘Asiatic’ Other. From a *fin-de-siècle* Eurocentric and anthropocentric viewpoint the Beetle could be said to constitute a lower order of sentient being, an unreadable alien entity devoid of emotion, incapable of sympathetic feeling and undeserving of it in return. Between the Beetle and the British in the novel, the absence of mutual understanding is especially compounded when she manifests as an insect. She is not a butterfly with cultural associations of lightness, beauty, and the soul.<sup>96</sup> She is not a locust linked to the eighth plague of Egypt, voraciousness, and an Old Testament God’s retribution. She is not a praying mantis devouring her sexual partner, nor a eusocial insect with access to the hive-mind camaraderie of some ants, wasps, and bees. The Beetle is a dung beetle, a roller of excrement, laying an egg in it from which

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<sup>94</sup> See for example Schmitt, ‘Victorian Beetlemania’ p. 44 citing Evans and Bellamy.

<sup>95</sup> Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p. 165.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Lafcadio Hearn, ‘Butterflies’, in *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* [1903] (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), pp. 179-204.

her vulnerable larva subsequently emerges. Born in the filth, for which can be read the backstreets of Cairo, the Egyptian woman has a provenance of the same nature.

Right from the beginning of Marsh's text, the Beetle is presented to the reader as distasteful with faecal associations. Anything the woman feels beneath the exoskeleton is discounted because of her sickening insect subalternity. The distancing narratological device of presenting her as a dung beetle makes an unbiased assessment virtually impossible, interfering with any chance of a sympathetic response. Howard Sklar identifies four significant ways an author stimulates sympathy for a character:

focalisation, "seeing" from the perspective of a character; homodiegetic narration, having direct access to the self-reported thoughts and/or feelings of a character; free indirect discourse (FID), entering the thoughts and/or feelings of a character through narration that "contain[s] mixed within it markers of two discourse events (a narrator's and a character's, two styles, two languages, two voices" [...] and, in some cases, omniscient narration, through which "a narrator who knows (practically) everything about the situations and events recounted [...] may report on a character's state of mind, feelings and other experiences."<sup>97</sup>

These techniques serve to diminish the distance between reader and character and stimulate sympathy: their absence has the opposite effect. In *The Beetle* they are barely present at all. There is neither focalisation nor homodiegetic narration since there is neither access to the Beetle's viewpoint and emotions nor an omniscient narrator. There is only a trio of flawed narrators, one of whom also speaks for a fourth deceased man, and their versions of events are incomplete and largely biased.

All that exists by way of an entry for readerly sympathy is that miniscule amount of free indirect discourse occurring in the intensely personal exchange referred to in my first chapter when the Beetle vocalises to Holt her desperation for

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<sup>97</sup> Howard Sklar, *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction* (Philadelphia PA: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2013), pp. 48-49. Sklar quotes Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (1987).

the love of Paul Lessingham. Her yearning words are followed by Holt's observation on her demeanour. At this stage he still refers to her as a man, a superficial judgement based chiefly on her extreme lack of beauty.

As, with soft cadences, he gave vent to these unlooked-for sentiments, the fashion of his countenance was changed. A look of longing came into his face—of savage frantic longing—which, unalluring though it was, for a moment transfigured him.<sup>98</sup>

At this moment the Beetle is not an expressionless insect, she is an earlier version of herself, a young Cairene girl full of desire and hope, who laments lost love in language which in a different novelistic genre might have been suited to a tragic heroine spurned by a faithless lover. 'Her whom he has taken to his bosom he would put away from him as if she had never been [...] he would forget she ever was'.<sup>99</sup> This is more than just revealing her sex, it is a wounded woman showing she suffers, and if suffering stimulates sympathy, the reader may just momentarily experience that emotion for the Beetle.

The Beetle is a late-Victorian lovelorn woman, whose morally 'proper' role once discarded is to fade away as Dijkstra notes.

The women who died — of yearning, preferably — were the icons of this religious-erotic fantasy. The women — most women fortunately — who refused to comply with this idea usually got their comeuppance by being typecast [...] as evil flies rising from the dunghill of degeneration.<sup>100</sup>

The Beetle yearns, but she refuses to comply with the idea she should die. She rises 'from the dunghill of degeneration' and even feeds upon it. The conflation of evil and insect is inevitable in the context of what Dijkstra refers to as 'the iconography of misogyny' and 'the morass of the nineteenth century's assault upon women'.<sup>101</sup> The

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<sup>98</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 30.

<sup>99</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 31.

<sup>100</sup> Dijkstra, p. 60.

<sup>101</sup> Dijkstra, p. viii.

'Woman of the Songs' finds no prospect of reconciliation with her former lover. Her warped attachment mutates into something monstrous just as her flesh mutates into chitin. This is how she survives. Lessingham's proposal of marriage to the younger, whiter, virginal Marjorie, does not defeat the Beetle, it drives her to even greater jealous rage.<sup>102</sup> It fuels her monstrous acts throughout, including the infiltration of Marjorie's bed in which it is hinted she perpetrates a lesbian assault, robbing the other woman of her future status as a *virgo intacta* bride. To experience even the faintest glimmer of sympathy for the Beetle in the face of the abominable actions of abduction, alleged rape and murder requires the reader to acknowledge the mitigating circumstances of her troubled past. It is a past which can only be pieced together from fragments of her own direct speech, and from Lessingham's guilty confession strategically withheld until the final book of the novel.

Lessingham's account gives new information that the Beetle was once a captivating young woman of Cairo controlled by her elders, perhaps even groomed for prostitution, and who became obsessed with the handsome, immature European on the look-out for thrills, who tired of her and tried to kill her. His intended victim was compelled to take on a literal exoskeleton or else submit to death by strangulation. That much Lessingham does not dispute. What is rather unpalatable is that twenty years after those events he shows no remorse for the attempted taking of her life. He retrospectively justifies his actions by claiming he was subjected to protracted date rape by a religious fanatic whose cult engaged in human sacrifice. Supposedly corroborating evidence is provided by a similar account related by a third party. In a novel where time is not presented linearly, where events overlap and are reimagined, it is just as likely Lessingham encountered the report through his numerous contacts and recounted a variation of the story as if it were his own. Conveniently (or suspiciously), the Clements, who might have verified his story, are

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<sup>102</sup> Four illustrations by John Williamson accompany the first edition of *The Beetle*. The second of them is Lessingham proposing marriage to Marjorie.



both dead.<sup>103</sup> Lessingham's nickname is 'The Apostle', but his words cannot be taken as the Gospel truth. He is an arch wordsmith with a shady past, and a social climber with an eye on his future. He is out for a more advantageous match eugenically and politically than with a colonial subject who is a fallen woman to boot, and so selects an untainted partner of more suitable breeding stock. He pays no obvious heed to his past crime until the noxious nuisance inconveniently returns to haunt him.

It is feasible the Beetle's upbringing has inured her to an abusive environment; that she still longs for a relationship with Lessingham despite his violence towards her; that she feels betrayed and driven to desperate ends by a passion not reciprocated; and that rejection warps desire into a monomaniacal thirst for revenge. Such an explanation is never properly explored. Sympathy for the spurned woman is at best negligible or at worst non-existent. Had her past been revealed sooner and more objectively, readers and characters might have been marginally less inclined to see her as morally and physically repugnant. They might have realised when she clasps Holt's throat at the end of Book I, she is re-enacting a traumatising event that had previously happened to her. But the Beetle's back-story is positioned so late in the novel her robbed youth and sacrificed humanity are discounted. An antithetical position to her is already too deeply entrenched.

The Beetle exhibits sympathy for her own former state, aware she is alone in feeling it. 'Who, at any time has shown mercy unto me [...]?'<sup>104</sup> Darwin's discussion on self-pity in *The Expression of the Emotions* is pertinent and worth quoting at length.

The vivid recollection of our former home, or of long-past happy days, readily causes the eyes to be suffused with tears; but here, again, the thought naturally occurs that these days will never return. In such cases we may be said to sympathise with ourselves in our present, in comparison with our former state. Sympathy with the distresses of others, even with the imaginary distresses of a heroine in a pathetic story, for whom we feel no affection, readily excites tears. [...] The feeling of sympathy is commonly explained by assuming that, when we

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<sup>103</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 216.

<sup>104</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 33.

see or hear of suffering in another, the idea of suffering is called up so vividly in our own minds that we ourselves suffer.<sup>105</sup>

The wistful Beetle never cries for herself, and no-one ever cries for her. Presented as she is with an insectile body and soul, no-one feels affection towards her. She is a scarab who is solitary as are all dung beetles, however, Marsh tampers with the human insect size ratio so Beetleness does not belittle her. Enlarged physicality ensures she cannot easily be overlooked. It reinforces her refusal to be consigned to the past for Lessingham's convenience. In the war of wounded womanhood, she shapeshifts into a supernatural scarab, which is a defense and a weapon, a blessing and a curse. My next section examines whether she emerges as partly pitiable or exclusively evil.

### Evil and Revulsion

'He is a devil,—hard as the granite rock,—cold as the snows of Ararat. In him there is none of life's warm blood'.<sup>106</sup> Taken out of context, this quote from Marsh's novel might be supposed to refer to the Beetle. In fact, it is said by the Beetle about Paul Lessingham. Cannon Schmitt denotes Marsh's creature 'an embodiment of exotic and feminised evil'.<sup>107</sup> While I agree with his attribution of sex, I wish to interrogate his assessment of evil. A useful way to explore the Beetle's evil aspects is to juxtapose Marsh's text with *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), Marie Corelli's immensely popular novel in which she places Satan in late-Victorian London where he keeps a female, Egyptian beetle as his familiar, establishing a firm literary link between this species of insect and wickedness.<sup>108</sup> Marsh may well have seen an opportunity to share in the success of one of the 'commercial behemoths of the 1890s' by expanding upon her

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<sup>105</sup> Darwin, *Expression of the Emotions*, p. 218.

<sup>106</sup> Marsh, Beetle, p. 31.

<sup>107</sup> Schmitt, 'Victorian Beetlemania', p. 37.

<sup>108</sup> Marie Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, the Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire* (London: Methuen, 1895). Marsh later inverted Corelli's plot device by placing Christ in fin-de-siècle London in *A Second Coming* (1900).

depiction of a supernatural scarab.<sup>109</sup> Corelli's beetle is significant in offering an insight into Satan's thought processes, despite only making two appearances in *The Sorrows of Satan*. She is also important for explicitly being connected to the rites of ancient Egypt. My previous chapters showed Marsh's human subject sharing nationality, gender, and vengeance narrative with Corelli's *Ziska*. Here I show Marsh's entomological subject sharing nationality, gender, and species with Corelli's insect. They even sound alike and repeatedly make what Fabienne Collignon in 'The Insectile *Informe*' onomatopoeically names the same 'buzzzzzzing' noise in flight.<sup>110</sup>

In Corelli's novel, Prince Lucio Rimanez is Satan in human form. The plot centres on him tempting impoverished author Geoffrey Tempest into a Faustian bargain while simultaneously seeking his own redemption through human goodness. Pure souls proving all too elusive, Satan is sorrowful, and his sad disillusionment with humankind's rampant immorality makes him a not unsympathetic character. Apart from his admiration of an incorruptible lady writer of popular fiction, who is presumably a thinly veiled representation of Corelli herself, his 'favourite' is an insect he keeps in a crystal container as both archaeological artefact and natural historical exhibit. It is evidently some sort of scarab with a carapace capable of giving off and reflecting light across a rich spectrum of colours. Max Barclay, Beetle curator at the Natural History Museum, comments how reflectiveness in beetles is caused by millions of microscopic prisms bouncing back rays of light.<sup>111</sup> Satan allows his beetle to fly around the room and settle on his hand. He displays it to Tempest who describes it in aesthetically pleasing terms: 'a brilliant winged insect with all the tints and half-tints of the rainbow. [...] The glittering beetle's body palpitated with the hues of an

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<sup>109</sup> Nick Freeman describes Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* as 'wildly successful', Nick Freeman, 'Tall Tales and True: Richard Marsh and late Victorian Journalism' in *Richard Marsh*, ed. by Margree et al., pp. 27-44 (pp. 34, 38).

<sup>110</sup> For the use of this insectile onomatopoeia see Fabienne Collignon, 'The Insectile *Informe*', *Extrapolation* 60.3 (2019), 229-48.

<sup>111</sup> Max Barclay, 'Beetles', *Natural History Museum*, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdRdgjOEcmE>> [accessed 30 June 2021].

opal, its radiant wings expanded [...] looking like a beautiful iridescent jewel.’<sup>112</sup>  
 Marsh’s Beetle too is a ‘glittering creature’.<sup>113</sup>

Visually, Satan’s creature is far from unappealing, but on learning of its history and how it was discovered living off dead flesh in the wrappings of a mummy, Tempest is aghast at its provenance. No attractiveness of the insect can compensate for the recoil in the body and mind of the man:

“Horrible!” I said—I confess, if I were you, I should not care to make a pet of such an uncanny object. I should kill it, I think.”  
 [Lucio] kept his bright intent gaze upon me.  
 “Why?” he asked. “I’m afraid, my dear Geoffrey, you are not disposed to study science. To kill the poor thing who managed to find life in the very bosom of death, is a cruel suggestion is it not?”<sup>114</sup>

The Devil is protective of the beetle, whereas Tempest, the writer of limited literary skills recommends its destruction. It is a moot point which of them is the more virtuous in their attitude. Rimaney considers the insect intelligent, possessing all five human senses absorbed from the corpse of the woman ‘who no doubt loved and sinned and suffered’.<sup>115</sup> If this were to be in any sense true, then the creature is something of a human hybrid as Marsh’s Beetle may also be. To kill it would verge on homicide or rather femicide. Satan’s words about loving and sinning and suffering are equally applicable to Marsh’s Egyptian woman and the Beetle into which she transmigrates. This goes some way to explaining why the assembled men of England cannot be seen to slaughter her because if they did so, it would cast severe doubt on their morality. Marsh neatly sidesteps the dilemma by shunting the responsibility for his insect’s death onto faceless technology. Too big to be crushed underfoot, ostensibly she is crushed in a railway accident, but there is more than a hint the resilient monster may have evaded death.

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<sup>112</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows of Satan*, p. 55.

<sup>113</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 116.

<sup>114</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 56.

<sup>115</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 56.

Corelli's scarab likewise seems incapable of dying. Satan and his insect are immortal with an attractive exterior, however their outward beauty does not equate to goodness. Rimanez defends his pet to Tempest, but in an abrupt change of attitude goes on to say: 'All the same I frankly admit to you that I believe it to be an evil creature. I do indeed! But I like it none the less for that'.<sup>116</sup> In Satan's opinion, the beetle has a 'wicked, brilliant, vampire soul', and since Satan is an expert assessor of souls, his opinion counts.<sup>117</sup> Tempest develops an increasing aversion to the scarab unrelated to how it looks and not solely driven by revulsion at its gruesome origins. It is a reaction to what he considers to be its malevolent nature: 'I examined the weird insect more closely. As I did so, its bright beady eyes sparkled, I thought vindictively, and I stepped back, vexed with myself at the foolish fear of the thing which overpowered me.'<sup>118</sup> Admiring descriptors for the beetle that reference rainbows and jewels cease as Tempest's admiration fades into anxiety and disgust. He begins to adopt unflattering epithets such as 'horrible thing', 'abominable "sprite" ', and 'loathly insect', adjectives of abjection that would be revisited for Marsh's Beetle.<sup>119</sup>

When, on a later occasion, Satan speculates about the insect's human history, he urges sympathy for her past suffering, much as this thesis seeks in small part for the Beetle. Tempest will have none of it.

"Who knows what the sprite suffered as a woman, Geoffrey! Perhaps she made a rich marriage, and repented it! At anyrate I am sure she is much happier in her present condition." [sic]

"I have no sympathy with such a ghastly fancy," I said abruptly, "I only know that she or *it* is a perfectly loathsome object to me".<sup>120</sup>

In his refusal to participate in Satan's musings about his pet and her putative consciousness, Tempest distances himself from the female insect by de-sexing her.

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<sup>116</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 57.

<sup>117</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 57.

<sup>118</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 57.

<sup>119</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, pp. 209, 210, 362.

<sup>120</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 210.

Linguistically the beetle becomes not 'she' but an italicised '*it*', not the embodiment of a woman who has suffered, not even a living thing, nor a capitalised Thing, but just a thing.

Satan regards his pet as a human soul in insect form, a being not necessarily discontented with her multicoloured chitinous exterior. The loathsomeness identified by Tempest is generated by the eyes and mind of the observer, and the observer is not always objective. This is a problem occurring throughout *The Beetle*. Marsh's insect is nobody's pet. She has no persuasive Satan to solicit a sympathetic response on her behalf. She has no advocate. There are none who argue her case, and the characters in the novel are so biased against her they almost universally fail to see her visual appeal, blinded as they are by literal and figurative darkness. Only Atherton, the more rational man of science sees in her insect manifestation a creature with her own beauty, superb colouring, and iridescent wings: 'a truly astonishing example of the coleoptera, [...] a vivid golden green'.<sup>121</sup> He appreciates her as a rare commodity, magnificent in hue and hugeness, not that an aesthetic appreciation makes him sympathetic towards the creature. His instinct is to kill the insect. Unlike Tempest, Atherton would not be killing as a moral reaction against vampiric beginnings or assumed vindictiveness: his motivation would be the amoral acquisitiveness of a collector. Schmitt identifies how in beetles, an 'alluring alterity gives rise to paroxysms of desire and bouts of miserly acquisitiveness', and Atherton is sorely tempted to stick a very large pin through 'the genus of copridae' and secure the superb scarab 'on a piece—a monstrous piece!—of cork'.<sup>122</sup> In possessing her, he would neutralise the threat of the large female insect and simultaneously neuter her. His violent action would convert her into '*it*'. At his hand the Priestess of Isis capable of transmigration into a sacred scarab would become a fixed non-living 'thing'.

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<sup>121</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 116.

<sup>122</sup> Schmitt, 'Victorian Beetlemania', p. 36; Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 121.

In Corelli's fictional universe souls are not fixed, and the author sets out her beliefs in *A Romance of Two Worlds*, a first-person narrative by a young female musician who assiduously quotes the Electric Principle of Christianity, where to be Oriental is an asset:

the theory of a deeply read and intelligent man [...] in whose veins ran the blood of the Chaldean kings—earnest and thoughtful Orientals, who were far wiser in their generation perhaps than we, with all our boasted progress, are in ours.<sup>123</sup>

The Electric Creed is based on 'the sympathetic influence of Christ' and sets out 'the Creator's love and sympathy with even the smallest portion of His creation'.<sup>124</sup> Key to the Creed is the theory of transmigration after death, in which souls move on from one existence to another and from one corporeal covering to another. In a karmic meting out of Natural justice, the soul gets the body it deserves. The following quotation from *A Romance of Two Worlds* indicates how, although Christ's love and sympathy stretch to all life forms, being reborn as an insect is a form of punishment.

Eternal Punishment is merely a form of speech for what is really Eternal Retrogression. For as there is a Forward, so there must be a Backward. The electric Germ of the Soul—delicate, fiery, and imperishable as it is—can be forced by its companion Will to take refuge in a lower form of material existence, dependent on the body it first inhabits. For instance, a man who is obstinate in pursuing *active evil* can so retrograde the progress of any spiritual life within him, that it shall lack the power to escape [...] but shall sink into the form of quadrupeds, birds, and other creatures dominated by purely physical needs. But there is one thing it can never escape from—*Memory*. And in that faculty is constituted Hell. So that if a man, by choice, forces his soul *downward* to inhabit hereafter the bodies of dogs, horses and other animals, he should know that he does so at the cost of everything except—Remembrance.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Marie Corelli, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, [1886] (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1931), p. 227.

<sup>124</sup> Corelli, *Romance*, pp. 236, 240.

<sup>125</sup> Corelli, *Romance*, pp. 240-41.

Given Corelli's analogy extends as far as plants, it is safe to assume insects are included in 'other animals'. The Creed is not a discrete part of the plot of one novel, the author herself believed in its doctrine of metempsychosis. Corelli openly states her credo in the 'Preface to the New Edition' (May 1896): 'The statements I have made concerning the future life awaiting us after death, I most emphatically and earnestly believe to be true,—particularly those which refer to the Progression or Retrogression of the Soul by the action of the Will'.<sup>126</sup>

A human soul may exchange bipedal fleshy covering to inhabit the six-legged exoskeleton of an insect, and *The Sorrows of Satan* needs to be read in this context. Throughout the novel Corelli uses entomological imagery to describe the human soul in insect form loved by Satan. She contrasts this with the ungodly insects in human form, whose self-serving, immoral antics plague Satan and drive him further and further from redemption. Satan prefigures Gaian philosophy in conceiving of humans as an infestation from which natural forces attempt to cleanse the earth.<sup>127</sup> He envisages mankind as 'the puny insect that troubles the planet's peace! [The sea] drowns the noxious creature when it can, with the aid of its sympathising comrade the wind!'<sup>128</sup>

The word 'noxious' echoes the vocabulary of Kirby and Spence referring to agricultural pests, and foreshadows Paul Lessingham's dehumanisation of the Woman of the Songs as a 'noxious insect'.<sup>129</sup> For humans to be 'noxious' is for them to be verminous, an analogy that Corelli's Satan extends to embrace the irritating 'social swarm' of London's upper classes who lack individuality and are as greedy as locusts.<sup>130</sup> Tempest likens his own wife to Satan's 'loathly insect' in the way she

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<sup>126</sup> Corelli, *Romance*, p. x.

<sup>127</sup> Gaia philosophy takes its name from the Greek goddess of the earth. The Gaia hypothesis propounded by James Lovelock in 1970 envisages earth as a self-regulating organism.

<sup>128</sup> Corelli, *Romance*, p. 219.

<sup>129</sup> William Kirby and William Spence, *An Introduction to Entomology* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1856).

<sup>130</sup> Corelli, *Romance*, p. 254.



battens on Rimanez's arm, parasitic and unwelcome.<sup>131</sup> Corelli's zoomorphism is unlikely to be a condemnation of insect nature. Anything objectionable in the entomological subject exists from the human perspective. Greg Garrard's argument on the 'rhetoric of animality' in *Ecocriticism* supports the view that any pejorative association 'depends in turn upon a prior, crudely anthropomorphic projection of despised human qualities onto these animals'.<sup>132</sup> According to twenty-first century ecocritical theory and the nineteenth-century Electric Creed, it is not the insect which should be considered unsympathetic or evil, but the human.

Marsh's Beetle takes refuge in the body of an insect. If the insect is considered in an exclusively zoological capacity, the question of morality becomes irrelevant. If viewed in a religious context, it opens up the possibility of a concomitant wicked nature. In the religion of Ancient Egypt, transmigrating into a scarab represents divine salvation. In late-Victorian Christianity, metamorphosis into a bug might be a form of monstrous damnation. The loss of the soul or what Machen calls 'The Inmost Light' manifests in the extreme physical repulsiveness of Agnes Black. It could be said to manifest in the repulsiveness of the Beetle too: although the assumption of her insect ugliness is usually arrived at without any visual verification. Most of the people most of the time believe the Beetle's exterior to be objectionable, and they understand this to mirror a diabolically evil interior. The word 'evil' occurs in *The Beetle* nineteen times. The Beetle is: 'evil smelling'; possesses 'the soul of something evil'; is an 'evil presence'; an 'evil thing'; and has the 'evil eye'.<sup>133</sup> These and other usages occur cumulatively throughout the novel until Augustus Champnell finally describes the Beetle as 'the personification of evil'.<sup>134</sup> There would seem to be less chance of feeling sympathy for Marsh's 'evil' beetle than for Corelli's very Devil himself.

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<sup>131</sup> Corelli, *Romance*, p. 385.

<sup>132</sup> Garrard borrows this phrase from Steve Baker, Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993); Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 160. Garrard's wide-ranging discussion is on racist applications of animal imagery and is not limited to insects.

<sup>133</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 17, 23, 34, 50, 107.

<sup>134</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 271.

Evil in *The Beetle* is addressed either obliquely or directly by many Marsh critics, but by none so comprehensively as Simon Marsden. His avowedly theological stance in 'Evil, Privation and the Absent Logos' constitutes a comparatively new position for the interpretation of Gothic literature in general and of *The Beetle* in particular.<sup>135</sup> He explores the concept of nothingness derived from Augustinian philosophy that theorises an absence of being constitutes evil. His position is that Marsh's insect is 'a kind of ontological and epistemological *lacuna*', meaning it must by extension be evil.<sup>136</sup> There are three main strands to Marsden's argument: firstly the Beetle defines itself as 'nothing—a shadow'; secondly the Beetle resembles the modern *fin-de-siècle* city with both entities characterised by destruction and incompleteness; and thirdly the 'trope of linguistic failure' signals even the language associated with the creature itself becomes 'ghostly and insubstantial'.<sup>137</sup> In essence: because the Beetle is self-effacing; because in some sense she is aligned with London's darker aspects; and because encounters with her cause words to fail; Marsden contends they demonstrate a privation that equates to evil. 'Nothing Moved, Nothing was Seen, Nothing was Heard and Nothing Happened'.<sup>138</sup>

Marsden's is a compelling argument in the context of the teachings of St. Augustine, although not entirely convincing beyond that framework. To counter his first point, I suggest a woman compelled to transmigrate into an insect to avoid death may well develop a distorted self-image leading to abnegation, and it is debatable to what extent body dysmorphia ought to be taken as proof of wickedness. His second point that the Beetle is 'in sympathy' with the city in the sense of being aligned with it falls away, since it could be offered just as much in support of her as against her, which my next chapter explores. His third argument concerning loss of speech is offset

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<sup>135</sup> Simon Marsden, ' "Nothing Moved, Nothing was Seen, Nothing was Heard and Nothing Happened": Evil, Privation and the Absent Logos in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', *Gothic Studies*, 1 (2017), 57-72.

<sup>136</sup> Marsden, p. 57.

<sup>137</sup> Marsden, p. 58.

<sup>138</sup> This quotation appears in the title of Marsden's paper and is taken from Marsh, *The Beetle*, p. 15.

by Minna Vuohelainen in ‘“You know not of what you speak”’, who states: ‘the threat to language represents anxieties over the possibility of an annihilation of British identity by the foreign presence.’<sup>139</sup> Speech is not absent due to evil in the Egyptian, but fear in the British. They are afraid their racial, sexual, geographical and taxonomical boundaries are being breached. Vuohelainen’s essay proposes *The Beetle* as an example of ‘*invasion gothic*’, with phobic reactions and incoherent speech originating in the western psyche rather than in the insect per se.<sup>140</sup> She echoes Marsden in commenting on the failure of language in the face of the Beetle: ‘characters’ silences and gaps in the plotline define the narrative, and the muteness provoked by the Beetle is at its centre’.<sup>141</sup> The key difference between Vuohelainen and Marsden is her perception ‘muteness’ is rooted in xenophobia, not evil. This thesis shares her view.

Vuohelainen’s reading of the novel indicates: ‘ability to command language and knowledge determines a person’s character, intelligence and [apparent] moral fortitude’.<sup>142</sup> Atherton snidely calls Paul Lessingham the ‘Apostle’ as if the politician were an early Christian pioneer on the cusp of sainthood. Indeed, Lessingham’s words so powerfully evoke notions of ‘knowledge, charity and *sympathy*’ [my emphasis] that they inspire love in Marjorie and idolatry in Holt, who both reason Lessingham speaks like an admirable man and so must be admirable.<sup>143</sup> Percy Woodville, on the other hand, his fellow Member of Parliament and Atherton’s drinking companion, has no command over either the written or spoken word. His ‘cuneiform’ writing is illegible, he does not compose his own speeches, and he is incapable of opening his mouth to say anything sensible in the House. Undeniably he is linguistically challenged, but

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<sup>139</sup> Vuohelainen, ‘“You know not of what you speak”’, p. 314.

<sup>140</sup> Vuohelainen, ‘“You know not of what you speak”’, p. 316.

<sup>141</sup> Vuohelainen, ‘“You know not of what you speak”’, p. 325. Simon Baron-Cohen’s research into autistic lack of empathy, speechlessness, and being deemed evil offers an alternative perspective on detrimental judgement coloured by affective resonance, Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

<sup>142</sup> Vuohelainen, ‘“You know not of what you speak”’, p. 320.

<sup>143</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 155.

inarticulacy does not expose him as evil. In his case, silence and stumbling are equated to silliness, not maleficence. He is the novel's light relief, not its dark immorality. Woodville's 'absent logos' in Marsden's terminology crucially has nothing to do with the Beetle. Just as she does not make the rain pour down on Holt in Book I, she does not make inarticulacy descend on Woodville in Book II. Speech deserts the Victorian English because they are bumbling, guilty, hysterical, or xenophobic.

Although the author does not give his subaltern scarab a narratorial voice, vocalising by the Egyptian is by no means 'absent'. The Woman of the Songs is impressively multilingual as is observed by young Lessingham: 'All languages seemed to be the same to her. She sang in French and Italian, German and English,—in tongues with which I was unfamiliar'.<sup>144</sup> She is a polyglot, an accomplishment linked to exposure to colonisers and travellers. She is even a kind of ventriloquist, who can place words in the mouths of others and uses the utterance of 'THE BEETLE!' like a curse or a spell.<sup>145</sup> Marsden's argument that Augustinian privation of the spoken word is analogous to evil in the Beetle is not so compelling when the scarab herself has control over it.

Theological privation is questionable as justification for declaring the Beetle evil and unworthy of sympathy, though the rhetoric of repugnance directed at her indisputably has the effect of linking an allegedly evil exterior with a presumed evil interior. Fred Botting observes this as a recurrent trope in 1890s Gothic. 'The fiction of the period is dominated by marked descriptions of facial features as telling signs of character.'<sup>146</sup> Lombrosian interpretations of the Beetle's human features are that they are indicative of immorality, inferiority and atavism, characteristics displayed in the female criminal. Setting them aside allows for a less biased analysis of her insect exterior, which, if viewed objectively, is far from aesthetically displeasing.

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<sup>144</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 209.

<sup>145</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 34, 42, 48.

<sup>146</sup> Botting, *Gothic*, p. 89.

The insect face is a cypher, but her shape and colours, not to mention awe-inspiring size, are to be appreciated. By the *fin de siècle*, Marina Warner notes: 'creepy crawlies took on another character, and their ordinary life cycles could no longer be so easily annexed to express diabolical ugliness.'<sup>147</sup> 'Beetlemania' was in full swing and Marsh was in sympathy with the Zeitgeist. Beetles were fascinating and fashionable. They cropped up as exotic embellishments on men's tie pins and on women's brooches, bracelets, earrings, and necklaces, touching their bare arms, necks, and bosoms. They were present in the home, out in society and even at church. Figure III:4 shows a Victorian cross (c.1860-1880) comprised of six beetles in a gilt setting.<sup>148</sup> Scarabs are pressed into the service of Christianity, their pagan associations all forgotten. In this cross, the beetles defy imputations of wickedness. Even to western religious eyes, the insect species becomes sympathetic.



Figure III:4

Scarab Cross (1860-1880)

Six Iridescent Beetles in Gilt

Setting,

2 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches

The Victorian Jewelry Museum

<sup>147</sup> Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p. 78.

<sup>148</sup> Image taken from The Victoria Jewelry Museum

<<http://www.timedancesby.com/images/victorianmuseum/vj132.htm>> [accessed 07 July 2021].

## Chapter Four

### The Beetle in Sympathy with the City

This chapter continues the theme of beetles spilling out from museums and laboratories to inhabit areas of the civilised world. It explores how Marsh's Beetle is in sympathy with 'real-and-imagined' London and sites its investigations in two areas I term respectively insect aesthetics and entomological spatiality.<sup>1</sup> Each offers a perspective on the Beetle's situatedness in the coleopterised and Egyptianised urban environment. The first section on insect aesthetics shows visually pleasing beetles existing in a variety of *fin-de-siècle* material cultures where they stimulate a sense of cognitive or corporeal harmoniousness through appreciation of their beauty. According to Rae Greiner: 'sympathy in the nineteenth-century imagination was already thoroughly implicated in questions of aesthetic form'.<sup>2</sup> In these circumstances, real and stylised insects are poised to evoke positive reactions. The second section on entomological spatiality encompasses geographical, architectural, commercial, and psychological spaces occupied by Marsh's shapeshifter, and ponders the extent to which the colonised subject in beetle form is in sympathy with the imperial capital. A concordance between city and insect stronger than that existing between city and native inhabitants will tend to promote imperial anxiety.

What follows is an examination of the foreign fictional Beetle bursting the boundaries of her text to interact with the perceived, the conceived and the lived spaces of the late-Victorian cityscape.<sup>3</sup> She is an expert navigator through the partially

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase, recycled in geocritical theory, is borrowed from Edward Soja. Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> D. Rae Greiner, 'Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel', *Victorian Studies*, 53.3 (Spring 2011), 417-26 (p. 418); Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Influenced by Henri Lefebvre, Robert T. Tally identifies these domains of the perceived, conceived and lived as modes of apprehending space, Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 118. For Lefebvre's 'conceptual triad', see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of*

Egyptianised English environment already populated by pretty bugs, and in that urban setting, she is potentially both sympathetic insect and invasive species.

### **Insect Aesthetics**

Insect aesthetics incorporates *fin-de-siècle* London's response to objects made with actual beetles or objects that depict beetles. Susan Lanzoni notes how, especially towards the close of the nineteenth century, sympathy was playing an important role in the harmonious appreciation of beautiful things: 'sympathy reigned supreme in the Anglo-American intellectual world as a vital social emotion, one that had organic or physiological elements, but that also extended into the realms of ethics and aesthetics'.<sup>4</sup> Rae Greiner makes a similar claim: 'sympathy in the nineteenth-century imagination was already thoroughly implicated in questions of aesthetic form'.<sup>5</sup> Beauty is a powerful affective register. If articles made of beetles or articles representing beetles realistically or stylistically are beautiful, their appearance will stimulate sympathetic sensations, however pleasure may be compromised by the knowledge that in the natural world beetles creep and crawl and breed in the dirt. The emotional reaction to them is therefore complicated by a combination of physiological and intellectual elements.

Carolyn Burdett addresses related issues in her essay 'Is Empathy the End of Sentimentality?'<sup>6</sup> She considers Vernon Lee's comments on the scientifically verifiable bodily harmoniousness experienced when one is exposed to artistic beauty, and debates whether the body leads the brain or vice versa. In 1897, the year of *The Beetle*, Lee was exploring the psychology of emotional response in terms of 'organic

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*Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. by R. Tally (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Lanzoni, 'Sympathy in *Mind*', 268-69.

<sup>5</sup> Greiner, 'Thinking of me', 418.

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn Burdett, 'Is Empathy the End of Sentimentality?', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 16.2 (2011), 259-74.

and mimetic sensations', and, along with Anstruther-Thompson, published a two-part article on 'Beauty and Ugliness'.<sup>7</sup> Lee is credited with introducing the word 'empathy' into the English language in 1909 to express the aesthetic responsiveness of physically feeling *with* an artistic object or another being, marking a nuanced difference between the empathetic feeling *with* and sympathetic feeling *for* someone or something extraneous to oneself.<sup>8</sup> By 1912 Lee and Thomson merge the visceral, instinctive emotion of empathy with the more intellectual and morally judgemental sympathy and characterise aesthetic empathy as foundational of and 'preceding all sympathy'.<sup>9</sup> Pleasure in spatial form is explicitly sympathetic not empathetic. 'All our pleasure in spatial form (i.e. visible shapes.—V.L.)... is therefore due to sympathy of a happy kind'.<sup>10</sup> Lee terms the emotion 'the aesthetic sympathetic feeling'.<sup>11</sup> This thesis is content to adopt her terminology and welcomes it as additional justification for employing sympathy rather than empathy in relation to *fin-de-siècle* insect aesthetics.

Reactions to the visible shape of a beetle seen as beautiful in an artificial setting, yet unappealing in its natural state, result from a combination of value judgements, learned associations and autonomic behaviours, factors which co-exist in tension with one another causing sympathetic discomfort. Rosi Braidotti observes insects provoke 'a reaction of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, disgust and desire'.<sup>12</sup> These conflicting emotions are to be found in late nineteenth-century readers shuddering at a Gothic novel about a horror-inducing Beetle, yet not baulking at the idea of wearing beetle parts on their person or admiring artistic reproductions of beetles or happily viewing the Beetle's deceased fellows in private or public collections.

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<sup>7</sup> Vernon Lee and C. Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', *Contemporary Review*, 72 (October–November 1897), 544–88.

<sup>8</sup> See Thesis Introduction footnote 115.

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Vernon and Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (London, John Lane, 1912), p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 2012, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 2012, p. 373.

<sup>12</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 149.



Beetle carapaces were compared to gemstones and precious metals and effectively commodified. *Johnson's Natural History* (1872) describes insects in effusive tones, quoting *Introduction to Entomology* at length:

Insects abound everywhere [...] "They appear," if we may use the beautiful language of Kirby and Spence, "to have been nature's favorite productions, in which, to manifest her power and skill, she has combined and concentrated almost all that is either beautiful and graceful, interesting and alluring or curious and singular [...]. To these, her valued miniatures, she has given the most delicate touch and highest finish of her pencil. Numbers she has armed with glittering mail, which reflects a luster like that of burnished metals; in others she lights up the dazzling radiance of polished gems".<sup>13</sup>

Rimanez's pet beetle in *The Sorrows of Satan* exemplifies this in being likened to 'a beautiful iridescent jewel'.<sup>14</sup> *Johnson's* goes on to extol the 'delicacy and beauty' of insects, which in contrast to the 'evanescent and fugitive' beauty of flowers is 'fixed and durable'.<sup>15</sup> Theirs is a beauty that does not die. The innate and enduring attractiveness of beetles gave them in the Victorian era a commercial value further enhanced by what Luckhurst refers to as a 'magical infusion of spectral value (transposing the idea of fetishism from anthropology to economics)'.<sup>16</sup> Michelle Tolini's article on 'Zoological Fantasy in Late-Nineteenth-Century Dress' identifies how entomological auctions in London peaked in the 1880s and 1890s stimulated by the demand for exotic specimens of beetles coming from jewellers, fashion houses and other establishments.<sup>17</sup> Beetles became transformed from small animals into commercial 'things', and, as ornamental objects with fascinating associations, they aroused 'sympathy of a happy kind'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> S. G. Goodrich et al., *Johnson's Natural History* (New York: A. J. Johnson, 1872), p. 534.

<sup>14</sup> Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> Goodrich, *Johnson's Natural History*, p. 534.

<sup>16</sup> Luckhurst, *Mummy's Curse: Dark Fantasy*, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Michelle Tolini, ' "Beetle Abominations" and Birds on Bonnets: Zoological Fantasy in Late-Nineteenth-Century Dress', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 1.1 (Spring 2002) <<http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring02/206-qbeetle-abominationsq-and-birds-on-bonnets-zoological-fantasy-in-late-nineteenth-century-dress>> [accessed 03 July 2021].

<sup>18</sup> Lee and Anstruther-Thomson 2012, p. 44.



Figure IV:1

Parure: Tiara, Earrings and Necklace,  
Forty-six Iridescent beetles (*Lamprocyphus  
augustus*) Mounted on Gold  
Phillips Brothers & Son of London (1884-1885)

One of the most magnificent sets of beetle jewellery in the late-Victorian era was a parure comprising tiara, earrings and necklace given to the Countess Castalia Rosalind Campbell by her husband, George Leveson-Gower, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Granville, and the then Home Secretary. These decorative insects of the aristocracy are mounted in gold with a fringe of lotus buds, and the three pieces shown in Figure IV:1 are intended to be worn together to create an entomological extravagance. In 2017, the British Museum Magazine describes the ‘spectacular parure’ as a ‘macabre, yet compelling ornament’, emphasising the tension between its inherent attractiveness and its associational repulsiveness.<sup>19</sup> Although the beetles are in fact large South American weevils gifted by the Portuguese Ambassador, the description by the British Museum’s curator links the pieces to the craze for all things Egyptian, and colonialism in North Africa.

The parure epitomises the increased interest in the natural world inspired by the writings of Darwin and by the import into Europe of exotic species. Among the educated elite, such jewels demonstrated esoteric knowledge for its own sake. Worn in the evening, under gas lighting, the shimmering effect would undoubtedly have made this set a striking conversation piece. It can also be read, however, on a more political level, in the context of Britain’s colonial possessions. The Egyptian taste had reached a peak in the 1860s with the opening of the Suez Canal, but there was renewed interest when Britain assumed power in Egypt in 1883, during Granville’s second term as Foreign Secretary from 1880 to 1885.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> J. Rudoe, ‘Brazilian Beetles’, *British Museum Magazine* (Autumn 2017), 50-51.

<sup>20</sup> Rudoe, ‘Brazilian Beetles’, pp. 50-51.

Paul Lessingham, though not a peer of the realm or a Minister like Granville, is a politician who effectively brings a scarab to the bedchamber of his soon-to-be spouse. The difference is that the Gothic Beetle is not an inanimate insect securely mounted in gold. She is a creature buzzing with life and threateningly mounting Marjorie's bed.



Figure IV:2

Detail: Necklace (c.1860)

Twenty-one Scarabs Mounted on 10ct Rose Gold

Lady Granville's parure was made by Phillips Brothers, the same jeweller from whom the Prince of Wales later commissioned scarab pieces, but it was not only royalty and the nobility who sported beetles. Less extravagant insect items were worn by the upper-middle classes too.<sup>21</sup> A detail of one such necklace is shown in Figure IV:2. The carapaces of individual scarabs can clearly be seen. Colloquially these types of jewellery were known as 'Cleopatra's Ornaments'.<sup>22</sup> By the time Marsh's own supernatural scarab hatched in her author's imagination, the beetles resting on the bosoms of society ladies were firmly linked to an alluring female Pharaoh and Ancient Egypt.

Ruth Hoberman, in 'Constructing the Turn-of-the-Century Shopper', describes such ornaments possessing a magical 'relational aura' or acquired meaning borrowed from tales of similar items of jewellery.<sup>23</sup> The curse tales *After Three Thousand Years* and *The Mummy's Soul* referred to in my introduction warn of the dangers of wearing jewellery sacrilegiously stolen from a tomb. Reproductions carry no such risk, but

<sup>21</sup> Dobson, *Sphinx*, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> Charlotte Gere and Judy Rudoe, *Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria* (London: British Museum, 2010), pp. 232-33.

<sup>23</sup> Ruth Hoberman, 'Constructing the Turn of the Century Shopper', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 37.1 (Spring 2004), 1-17 (pp. 2-3).

safely participate in exoticism without the downsides of the authentic pieces. In 1894 with some bemusement, *Cornhill Magazine* perceives them to be talismanic of good luck.

It is strange, however, how hard all superstitions die. [...] These old Egyptian insect gods are now being worn once more by English ladies [...] The custom has spread so much that scarabs will perhaps soon become the fashion [How odd that people in the nineteenth century should still be influenced by conceptions as to the godhead of a particular dung-beetle originally formed by the half-savage Africans of ten thousand years ago.<sup>24</sup>

Late-Victorian ornamental beetles were decorative devices carrying cultural meaning. Neither curse nor blessing were intrinsic in the insects. They were anthropological conceits imposed upon them.

As well as beetles being all the rage in jewellery at the *fin de siècle*, entomological embellishments were added to garments and accessories. Not everyone was an enthusiast. In *The Art of Beauty* (1883), Mrs Haweis disapproves of bugs on bonnets: ‘something equally bad in taste—e.g. moths, beetles, lizards, mice &c.—can never be a beautiful object’, and her view as to their inappropriateness is prompted not by squeamishness, but by a sense of her own superior aesthetic sensibility.<sup>25</sup> ‘The large and gaudy insects that crawl over them are cheap and nasty to the last degree’.<sup>26</sup> *Punch* spoofs the phenomenon in ‘Curious Entomological Study, the cartoon shown in figure IV:3. It depicts an entire lady’s hat or hairstyle as a beetle with markings resembling googly eyes. The trend’s tendency towards comic ridiculousness is being mocked.

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<sup>24</sup> Anon, ‘Insect Gods’, *Cornhill Magazine* N.S. 22 (January 1894), 45-55 (pp. 53-54).

<sup>25</sup> Mrs H. R. Haweis, *The Art of Beauty*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Haweis, p. 164.



Figure IV:3

'Curious Entomological Study'

*Punch* (09 April 1869), p.144

Tolini accounts for the practices of 'Beetle Abominations' and 'Birds on Bonnets' as an attempt by predominantly urban middle-class women to reconnect with nature by turning the animate into the ornamental. Drawn by the appeal of iridescent beetle wings, and wearing brightly coloured specimens from Brazil, India or Africa, the women themselves became 'walking natural history exhibits', and a few, according to Tolini and Rosemary Scanlon McTier, blurred the boundary between nature and decoration by going so far as to 'adorn themselves with live jewel beetles secured with a miniature harness and leash or trapped in a small but ornate cage.'<sup>27</sup> They were showcasing (dead, or very occasionally alive) some of the insects available for viewing in museums and private collections or displayed under glass in the home. In effect they were parading fashionable versions of Satan's pet and Marsh's monster.<sup>28</sup>

In 1882, the periodical *Art Amateur* carried a series, 'Art in Dress', in which the author bemoans the 'wearing of horribly gaudy and glittering insects not only in hats and bonnets but in various parts of dress'.<sup>29</sup> Tolini comments how the writer of the piece also 'recounts an occasion when a woman, about to brush a beetle off a lady's

<sup>27</sup> Tolini, para 13; Rosemary Scanlon McTier, *"An Insect View of Its Plain": Insects, Nature and God in Thoreau, Dickinson and Muir* (London: McFarland & Company Inc., 2013), p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Bob Brier, *Egyptomania: Our Three Thousand Year Obsession with the Land of the Pharaohs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.110.

<sup>29</sup> Anon, 'Art in Dress: Bird and Insect Dress Adornments', *Art Amateur*, 7.6 (1882), 130.

shoulder, was horrified to discover that the insect was sewn into her ensemble'.<sup>30</sup> My first chapter claimed an insect on the shoulder is the epitome of a noxious nuisance to Madeleine Orme in Marsh's *The House of Mystery*. My third chapter suggested it was an unfit subject for Briton Rivière's sentimental art. This chapter shifts perspective to reveal how to some milliners or costume designers as well as purchasers of their products (although clearly not to all critics) insects on the shoulder could be a boon.

Beetles in their entirety were frequently mounted on gold in women's jewellery and might be worn by showier gentlemen on formal occasions, for example as shirt studs. Lustrous elytra were used to decorate evening dresses by being sewn onto a neutral background where they glimmered much as modern sequins do. Figure IV:4 shows an example from the collection of the Museum of London made by Louise Winter of Cavendish Square in 1893. In the newness of its heyday, the glowing blue-green beetle wing cases would have contrasted gloriously against the white silk. Handling insect parts for the purpose of beautifying garments was considered an entirely suitable pastime for ladies of leisure who, according to the Museum of London, were advised to use 'a Walker's number eight needle and green silk thread'.<sup>31</sup>



Figure IV:4

Left: Silk Evening Dress Adorned with Jewel Beetle Elytra (1893)

Right: Detail

© Museum of London i.d. 60.22/2

<sup>30</sup> Tolini, para. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Museum of London <<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/81463.html>> [accessed 03 July 2021].



Figure IV:5

Left: John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady MacBeth* (1889)

Oil paint on canvas, 22.1 x 11.43 cm  
Tate, London

Below: *Ellen Terry as Lady MacBeth*,  
*Guardian* Photograph, 11 March 2011



Even though Winter's evening dress is a splendid piece, it pales into insignificance beside the famous beetle-wing dress worn by Ellen Terry when she performed the role of Lady MacBeth opposite Henry Irving at London's Lyceum Theatre.<sup>32</sup> Wearing her coleopterous costume Terry played to packed houses on both sides of the Atlantic and secured herself and her dress an international reputation. It was inspired by Terry having told her costume designer about an evening dress worn by Lady Randolph Churchill with a bodice 'trimmed all over with green beetles' wings'. Terry's own stage gown contained more than a thousand iridescent casings from the fore-wings of jewel beetles (*Sternocera aequisignata*).<sup>33</sup> With its shimmering insects, the dress caused a sensation whenever the actress put it on. Terry wrote about it to her daughter. 'I wish you could see my dresses. They are superb, especially the first

<sup>32</sup> Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1908); The Irving Society <<https://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk/>> [accessed 03 July 2021].

Ellen Terry (1847-1928) was considered the leading Shakespearean actress for two decades.

<sup>33</sup> Terry, *Story of My Life*, p. 353.

one: green beetles on it [...] it is in colour that it is so splendid [...] The whole thing is Rosetti—rich stained-glass effects'.<sup>34</sup> John Singer Sargent, the most celebrated portrait artist of his generation (who also painted the anonymous *Egyptian Woman* shown in Figure I:5) captured the most famous actress in England costumed in her iconic outfit. She recalls the painting being 'the sensation of the year'.<sup>35</sup> Figure IV:5 shows *Ellen Terry as Lady MacBeth* alongside a photograph of her in that role.

Nina Auerbach comments how Terry's representation of character embodied a 'necromantic intensity' in which she becomes 'an amalgam of the demonic and the divine'.<sup>36</sup> Discussing the painting in particular, Auerbach goes on to note, 'Shakespeare is a catalyst for Sargent's vision of a monumental Ellen Terry at her moment of self-transfiguration'.<sup>37</sup> There is an emphasis on enlargement, and Auerbach considers acting to be itself a form of controlled metamorphosis. I draw a parallel between the chitinous decoration donned by Terry in the character of the Scottish Queen and the carapace of the sacred scarab taken on by Marsh's Egyptian. Both women encapsulate elements of demonism and divinity. Both women undergo an apotheosis when they metamorphose. Both women adopt a form of beetle exoskeleton which visually and conceptually functions as an armour against their own emotions.<sup>38</sup> The magnificent robe of the one and monstrous insect exterior of the other are indicative of newfound strength, but it is a strength which comes with sacrifice or abandonment of humanity. While beetle garb is sympathetic to the interests of the character, it places them at a far remove from those they encounter. It makes them antipathetic.

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<sup>34</sup> Terry, *Story of My Life*, p. 307.

<sup>35</sup> Terry, *Story of My Life*, p. 305.

<sup>36</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1982), pp. 203, 206.

<sup>37</sup> Auerbach, p. 207.

<sup>38</sup> That Marsh knew Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is evident in Holt's paraphrase of Lady Macbeth's 'Stand not upon the order of your going/ But go at once', Shakespeare, *Macbeth* III.4; 'I would not have stood upon the order of my going, but gone at once', Holt in Marsh, *Beetle* pp. 40-41. See also Atherton, *Beetle*, p. 230.



When Ellen Terry arrived at Sargent's studio wearing the beetle-wing dress, the artist's neighbour, Oscar Wilde, was moved to comment:

The street that on a wet and dreary morning has vouchsafed the vision of Lady Macbeth in full regalia magnificently seated in a four-wheeler can never again be as other streets: it must always be full of wonderful possibilities.<sup>39</sup>

Terry in costume effects a magical and permanent change on the cityscape. Wilde was not the only one to wax lyrical about the dress. In 1889, the thrill for the *Carlisle Patriot* was not supernaturalism or aesthetic appeal, it was excitement at the display of hyperbolic consumerism.

There are on the dress no fewer than 8,000 of these beetles' wings. They were obtained for Miss Terry by Madame Augutte, the eminent costumier of Wellington Street, Strand, who now boasts that she has bought up every beetle in Europe.<sup>40</sup>

In 1890, *St James's Gazette* complimented the actress and her elytra-enhanced costume: 'I did like Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth—those beetle wings were so very effective'.<sup>41</sup> In 1893, just four years before *The Beetle*, newspapers were still commenting in wording almost identical to one another how, 'many ladies of fashion [were influenced by Ellen Terry] as Lady Macbeth with a gown embroidered with Indian beetles which made a splendid foil to the auburn tresses of her hair.'<sup>42</sup> Examples such as these demonstrate how the leading lady and her insect apparel fed each other's fame, and the beetle-wing dress acquired immortality in oils and in print.

To this day, the iridescent gown is regarded as a significant article in the National Trust's collection and continues to arouse intense interest. Between 2005

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<sup>39</sup> 'Ellen Terry as Lady MacBeth' <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sargent-ellen-terry-as-lady-macbeth-n02053>> [accessed 07 July 2021].

<sup>40</sup> *Carlisle Patriot*, Friday 11, January 1889.

<sup>41</sup> *St James's Gazette*, Thursday 27 February 1890.

<sup>42</sup> This phraseology was adopted by amongst other publications *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 02 November 1893, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 07 November 1893, and *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, 09 November 1893.

and 2011 it underwent a restoration costing more than £110,000, after which it was available for viewing at Smallhythe Place in Kent, the home of Ellen Terry from 1899 until her death in 1928.<sup>43</sup> Terry's beetle dress was removed from public display in 2020 in readiness for reunification with Sargent's portrait. It was to have been a juxtaposition of celebrity beetles in theatrical textile and fine art, however, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed this enterprise if not indefinitely, then certainly beyond the summer of 2021.



Figure IV:6

Danny Osborne, *Oscar Wilde Memorial Sculpture* (Detail), 1997, Merrion Square, Dublin

Nephrite Jade, Thulite, Granite, Charnockite, Porcelain, Bronze and Granite

Wilde, who so enthusiastically witnessed the glorious urban spectacle of Terry travelling to her portrait sitting, was himself a wearer of beetles. His aesthetic appreciation lay not in decorative applications of real beetles, but in the stylised artificial scarab image carved into an emerald, mounted in gold, encircling his own finger. His father, William Wilde, had written much on the *Scarabaeus sacer* as the emblem of creation, and the son appropriated the symbolism for his own creative power. Danny Osborne's sculpture of Wilde faces his childhood home in Merrion Square, Dublin. Figure IV:6 reveals the scarab ring on the little finger of his left hand.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Maev Kennedy, 'Ellen Terry's Beetlewing Gown back in Limelight After £110,000 Restoration', *Guardian*, 11 March 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/mar/11/ellen-terry-beetlewing-gown-macbeth>> [accessed 03 July 2021].

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Smith, 'Sculpting Irishness: A Discussion of Dublin's Commemorative Statues of Oscar Wilde and Phil Lynott', *Sculpture Journal*, 21.1 (2012), 71-81.

Robbie Ross, the first man with whom Wilde had a homosexual relationship, wore a 'large turquoise blue scarab ring' on the same finger.<sup>45</sup> According to Ancient Egyptian lore, with which Wilde is likely to have been acquainted, the ring ought to have been worn on the forefinger to connect directly with his heart. He was not a slim man: perhaps the scarab ring simply did not fit.

Contemporaries and friends were very well acquainted with Wilde's scarab jewellery, although accounts differ in referring to one scarab ring or two, and responses vary between being critical or complimentary. Frank Harris's recollection uses the vocabulary of nausea. 'He shook hands in a limp way I disliked; his hands were flabby, greasy; his skin looked bilious and dirty. He wore a great green scarab ring on one finger.'<sup>46</sup> Harris's unsympathetic reaction could be as much homophobic dislike of the hand on which the beetle ring is worn as the heathen religion it invokes or zoological creature it represents. William Rothenstein's description of Wilde is equally disparaging. 'His hands were fat and useless looking, and the more conspicuous from a large scarab ring he wore.'<sup>47</sup> In these accounts the jewelled ring exacerbates and participates in its wearer's parasitic unattractiveness. In contrast to Wilde's detractors, Ada Leveson remembers Wilde's hands as 'small', and, in her account of the first night of *The importance of Being Ernest* on 14 February 1895, the 'large scarab ring' acquires greater significance through visual association with Wilde's emblematic green carnation.

That evening he was dressed with elaborate dandyism and a sort of florid sobriety. His coat had a black velvet collar. He held white gloves in his small, pointed hands. On one finger he wore a large scarab ring.

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<sup>45</sup> Philip Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy and the Most Outrageous Trial of the Century* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), p.15; Ilze Kacane, 'Insects in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Culture: Pre-Raphaelitism', *Nature and Culture: Comparative Studies*, 4 (Daugavpils University Academic Press, 2012), 26-41.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* [1938] (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited 2007), p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein 1872-1900* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931), p.86.

A green carnation—echo in colour of the ring—bloomed savagely in his buttonhole.<sup>48</sup>

Chris Healy writes how, during a later interview with the author, Wilde ‘gazed reflectively at the beautiful scarab ring on his finger’, and the journalist does not shy away from applying the epithet ‘beautiful’ to the stylised beetle.<sup>49</sup> He hints at the deeper associations of the ring for Wilde, who was purported to have been wearing it when he faced trial. Eleanor Fitzsimons’s article, ‘Oscar Wilde and the Mystery of the Scarab Ring’, emphasises numerous occasions on which commentators refer to the ring, from which she makes the reasonable deduction Wilde either wore it frequently or else never took it off.<sup>50</sup> She quotes, among others, Henri de Regnier’s recollection of how Wilde would ‘idly tap the ash from his gold-tipped Egyptian cigarettes with a ringed finger. The setting of this ancient ring held the rounded back of a pharaoh’s scarab’.<sup>51</sup> De Regnier’s description encompasses both the reproduced convex belly of the natural insect and its cultural associations.

Gideon Spiller’s interview with Oscar Wilde is an interaction not included among Fitzsimons’s examples, however it throws even more light on the ancient origins of what Spiller explicitly remembers as two scarab rings. Commenting on their inscriptions, he gives credence to an Egyptian curse narrative effectively challenged by Wilde to do its worst.

These precious stones are engraved with cabbalistic symbols and come from an Egyptian Pyramid. He [Wilde] claims that the emerald on his left hand is the real cause of all his happiness, and that the one on his right hand is the cause of all his unhappiness. To my observation—which was logical enough, I think—that he should have taken off the

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<sup>48</sup> Ada Levenson, *Letters to the Sphinx* (Duckworth, 1930) reproduced in *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. by E. H. Mikhail (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 270.

<sup>49</sup> Chris Healy. *Confessions of a Journalist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), p. 134.

<sup>50</sup> Eleanor Fitzsimons, ‘Oscar Wilde and the Mystery of the Scarab Ring’, <<http://www.irishegyptology.com/oscar-wilde>> [accessed 03 July 2021]

<sup>51</sup> Henry de Regnier quoted in Fitzsimons.

evil ring, he replied with a changed voice "To live in happiness, you must know some unhappiness in life".<sup>52</sup>

There is a fatalism and a wistfulness in Wilde's response, and Eleanor Dobson reads Wilde and Corelli's sorrowful Satan as doubles. In a weird inversion, the fictional live insect of Rimanez functions as a metaphor for the real, artificial, scarab ring of Wilde. Both constitute a 'demonic artefact, perched on the devil's finger'.<sup>53</sup> By 1922, Corelli was referring to Wilde himself as 'that pestiferous creature'.<sup>54</sup> In her eyes the writer had become a noxious insect.

For Wilde, the appeal of stylised beetles lay in the 'very keynote of aesthetic eclecticism [...] the true harmony of all really beautiful things'.<sup>55</sup> He appears to have found the science of entomology or the pursuit of collecting real specimens to be tedious, inconsequential activities if the attitude of Lady Narborough in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is anything to go by when she is forced to listen to 'the duke's description of the last Brazilian beetle that he had added to his collection'.<sup>56</sup> Another of Wilde's characters, who may be ventriloquising the author is Vivian in 'The Decay of Lying', who states: 'Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to Art they must be translated into artistic conventions'.<sup>57</sup>

More closely inspired by the natural world were the creative energies of the Arts and Crafts Movement. William Morris's and Philip Webb's design for Trellis Wallpaper (1862), shown in Figure IV:7, offers a highly organised scene of birds and

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<sup>52</sup> G. Spiller, 'An Interview with Oscar Wilde', quoted in D. Coakley, *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Irish* (Dublin: Town House, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Eleanor Dobson, *Writing the Sphinx: Literature, Culture and Egyptology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020), p. 12, pp. 78-79.

<sup>54</sup> Marie Corelli to Anna Maria Nairne Greenwood, 14 November 1922 quoted in Dobson, *Writing the Sphinx*, p. 76.

<sup>55</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Intentions: The Decay of Lying, Pen, Pencil and Poison, The Critic as Artist, The Truth of Masks* [1891] (New York: Brantano's, 1904), p. 66.

<sup>56</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Simkin Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd., 1891), p. 214.

<sup>57</sup> Wilde, *Intentions*, p. 22.

flying insects among the roses. It features as a minor player in the repeated pattern a semi-concealed beetle at the centre of a flower. In the final block-printed wallpaper (1864), the beetle's colour matches the leaves and its head is buried among the stamen. Even though a bee might have been a more predictable choice, the William Morris Gallery confirm it is indeed a beetle.<sup>58</sup> Birds flitting between the struts of the trellis have an eye to devouring the other insects, but the pollinating beetle is notably large compared to the other animals and protected by a hard carapace and so less vulnerable as prey.

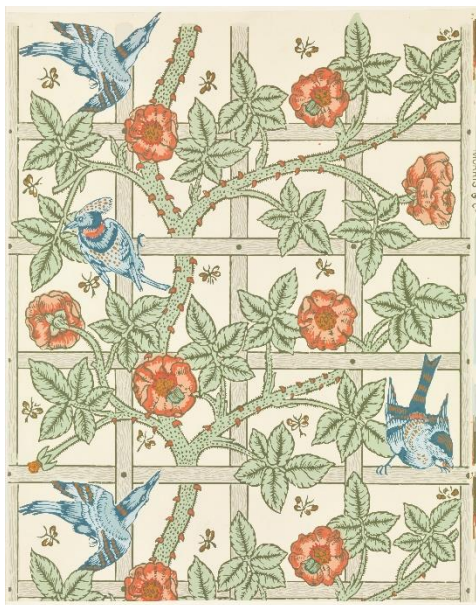


Figure IV:7

William Morris and Philip Webb,  
Morris and Company

Top: *Design for Trellis Wallpaper*  
(1862) Detail.

© William Morris Gallery

Bottom: *Trellis* (1864)

Block printed in distemper colours

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New  
York

Public domain

<sup>58</sup> William Morris Gallery, 'Learning Inspiration from Nature',  
<[https://wmgallery.org.uk/media/\\_file/learning/inspiration\\_from\\_nature\\_teachers\\_notes.pdf](https://wmgallery.org.uk/media/_file/learning/inspiration_from_nature_teachers_notes.pdf)>  
[accessed 03 July 2021].

Unapologetically celebratory of oversized beetles is the ruby lustre-glazed Dish of William De Morgan (1839-1917) shown in Figure IV:8 with its geometric pattern of three beetles with elytra parted and delicate underwings spread. It stands as evidence, if any were needed, that it was widely known scarabs could fly. De Morgan was a skilled designer of stained glass, tiles and pottery, and worked for Morris & Co between 1863 and 1872. He developed the technique for adding an ultra-thin luminous finish to pottery through the application of metal oxides followed by re-firing in a kiln at over 1,000 degrees centigrade. His 1892 report on 'Lustre Ware' for the *Journal of the Society of Arts* emphasised Egypt as a key influence on his glaze and decoration.<sup>59</sup> That same year, as a world authority on the subject, he was speaking with the Egyptian government about his process.<sup>60</sup> De Morgan's mathematical precision, chemical and mechanical skills, and animal motifs are exemplified in his ceramic celebration of scarabs.<sup>61</sup>



Figure IV:8

William De Morgan, *Three Beetles*, Late C19th,  
Ruby Lustre Dish,  
The Guildhall Art Gallery, London

A parallel artistic trend to the Arts and Crafts Movement prevalent in the 1880s and 1890s throughout Europe, and borrowing directly from nature, was Art Nouveau. One of its greatest practitioners, René Lalique, frequently drew inspiration from insects and created sunning jewellery through modern manufacturing

<sup>59</sup> William De Morgan, 'Lustre ware', *Journal of The Society of Arts* 40.2066 (24 June 1892), 756-64.

<sup>60</sup> De Morgan Collection <<https://www.demorgan.org.uk/discover/the-de-morgans/william-de-morgan/>> [accessed 07 July 2021].

<sup>61</sup> The piece formed a key part of 2018 touring exhibition, *Sublime Symmetry: The Mathematics Behind William De Morgan's Ceramic Designs*.

techniques.<sup>62</sup> Piya Pal-Lapinski notes how ‘the form of the scarab was to become crucial to several of [Lalique’s] most phantasmagoric pieces’, and Figure IV:9 shows examples of the sacred beetles incorporated repeatedly in his ring designs.<sup>63</sup> Considering one such item, Holland Cotter, *New York Times* art critic focuses on Lalique’s blend of naturalistic style with monstrosity: a ‘hyper-realistic enamel beetle [...] virtuosically rendered and utterly freakish’.<sup>64</sup> The actress Sarah Bernhardt was one of Lalique’s most famous clients. For her performance in Moreau and Sardou’s *Cléopâtre*, he designed a jewelled corsage in which two women metamorphose into scarabs. The corsage shown in Figure IV:10 is on a similar theme of Egyptian scarabs flanked by winged women, but it has not proved possible to ascertain if it is the one worn by Bernhardt.<sup>65</sup>



Figure IV:9

René Lalique, Scarab Rings (c.1897)

Left: Gold, Enamel and Opal ring. Right: Gold and Enamel ring. Private Collection.

<sup>62</sup> René Lalique (1860-1945) studied drawing at Crystal Palace School of Art where he refined his naturalistic style.

<sup>63</sup> Piya Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture: A Reconsideration* (Durham, N.H: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), p. 99.

<sup>64</sup> Holland Cotter, ‘When New Art Was All Called Art Nouveau’, *New York Times*, 5 November 2000, p. 21.

<sup>65</sup> Like Marsh’s Beetle, Bernhardt would later play the man when she performed the title role of Hamlet in 1890.





Figure IV:10

René Lalique, *Scarab Corsage Ornament* (1897)

Gold, Chrysophase and Diamond, Private Collection, Paris.

The trope of the woman fused with insect was most notably repeated by Lalique in *Dragonfly Woman* shown in Figure IV:11 with which Bernhardt was also irresistibly fascinated and which she reputedly also wore on stage. Jewellery historian, Michael Koch describes *Dragonfly Woman* as a ‘hybrid of predatory insect, delicate winged monster, dreaming female and clawed beast’.<sup>66</sup> Close inspection of the bare-breasted woman’s helmet reveals that on either side of her head sits a scarab. The piece delights and disturbs in its ambivalence as to whether the woman is being consumed by the insect or emerging from it. She may be a hybrid creature or she may be a soul captured on the point of metamorphosis. She is both glorious and grotesque,

<sup>66</sup> Michael Koch, ‘The Rediscovery of Lalique’s Jewelry’, trans. by Rosemary Fitzgibbon, *The Journal of Decorative Art and Propaganda Arts*, 10 (Autumn 1988), 28-41 (p. 33).

and like Marsh's near contemporaneous Beetle, she defies the natural human and entomological size ratio.



Figure IV:11

René Lalique, *Dragonfly Woman* (c.1897-1898). Right: Detail

Corsage of Gold, Enamel, Chrysophase, Opal, Diamonds

Calouste, Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

The first section of this chapter is named 'Insect Aesthetics' because it focuses on beetles' decorative value and stimulation of a harmoniously sympathetic reaction, however it was not the only way in which insects and pleasurable enjoyment were linked in the nineteenth century. Beetles featured on quirky greetings cards such as those shown in Figure IV:12 for cheerful private display. They also played a role in humorous public entertainment. Figure IV:13 shows two handbills, one dating back to 1805, and, according to the Insect Museum, it is the earliest known promotion of a live insect in a circus or menagerie. Ladies and gentlemen and their servants could enter the Lyceum on the Strand and be enthralled and bewildered by the skills of the famous 'Dungo', whose descendants continued to perform across the country under the same name for a further one-hundred-and-sixty years.<sup>67</sup> The second piece of

<sup>67</sup> Insect Circus Museum <<http://www.insectcircus.co.uk/museum.php>> [accessed 03 July 2021].

ephemera of 1883 advertises Mr Maroc, the Beast Tamer at Beastley's Amphitheatre in Lambeth, a rival menagerie and circus to Babcock's & Woodruff's. Here with a subtle difference of emphasis, attention is less on the personalised bug performer than on the human handler. What the handbills have in common is a manipulation of the scale of human and beetle done not to induce horror as in Marsh's novel, but to invite incredulity at the strength and dexterity of the insects. It was a trope which would continue in early film as my fifth chapter will explore.



Figure IV:12

Beetle Greeting Cards  
(c.1880)

Ephemera in Public  
Domain.

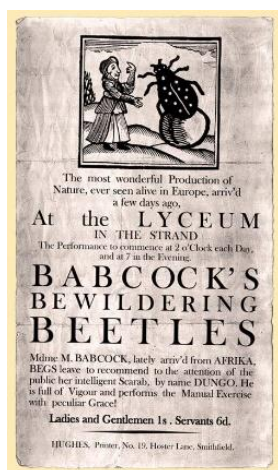


Figure IV.13

Left: *Babcock's Bewildering Beetles* (1805)

Right: *Mr. Maroc: The Beast Tamer* (1883)

© 2020 Insect Circus Society



So far, this chapter has pointed to beetles on tiaras, necklaces, earrings, dresses, bonnets, stage costumes, paintings, novelists' rings, wallpaper, decorative plates, greetings cards, and in their own dedicated circuses, quite apart from in private collections and in museums dedicated to zoology, archaeology, and art. It has offered an extended illustration of coleopteran occupation of the creative imagination and consequent ubiquity in late-Victorian London. This preceding section on insect

aesthetics discussed the sympathetic resonance experienced bodily as a result of pleasing encounters with the beautiful beetles of jewellery, fashion and high value material objects or the entertaining insects of low carnival. I pointed to a disconnect between those positive responses and the negative affect generated by the Beetle at the heart of Marsh's novel and suggested there may in fact be some transference inadvertent or otherwise between them. This has paved the way for the second section where, without abandoning cultural associations altogether, I place more emphasis on the built environment in considering the interaction of *The Beetle*, the novel, and the Beetle, the character, with the *fin-de-siècle* metropolis.

### Entomological Spatiality

I now turn my attention to entomological spatiality, the point at which the interdisciplinary critical approaches of spatial theory and literary geography intersect with cultural entomology.<sup>68</sup> The beginning of this chapter referred to 'real-and-imagined' places, borrowing that designation from political geographer, Edward Soja. I now apply his tripartite division of spatial categories to *The Beetle*. Firstspace is the actual city of London in all its concrete materiality, physically inhabited, perceived, and empirically mapped. Secondspace is the mental construct of the metropolitan heart of Empire, its power and ideology. Thirdspace as defined by Soja is the 'mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism and extends well beyond them in scope, substance and meaning.'<sup>69</sup> Thirdspace in the context of this thesis is the intersection of Egyptomania, beetlemania, imperialism, postcolonialism, evolutionism, Gothicism and aestheticism

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<sup>68</sup> For spatial theory, see for example Robert T. Tally Jr, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (London: Routledge 2017); Robert T. Tally Jr, 'Spatial Literary Studies versus Literary Geography?', *English Language and Literature*, 46.3 (2019), 391-408; Sheila Hones, 'Spatial Literary Studies and Literary Geography', *Literary Geographies*, 4.2 (2018), 146-49.

<sup>69</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace*, p. 11.

in a city where multiple copies of *The Beetle* reproduce the scarab's name and image in booksellers and station stalls, and the fictional insect is imaginatively absorbed.

Literary geographer, Sheila Hones declares: 'fiction can usefully be understood as a geographic event, a dynamic, unfolding collaboration happening in time and space'.<sup>70</sup> The writer has creative agency: interpretive agency resides with the reader. Both emerge out of spatiotemporal influences, which for reader and critic are in a state of flux. In Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, in Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, and in Fredric Jameson's *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, late-Victorian London stands as the centralised hub of a world system: a global city informed by imperialism, hegemony, subalternity, and a multiplicity of international and interracial cultural dynamics.<sup>71</sup> Marsh's novel and his central character operate in this milieu. The overriding methodology of this thesis is cultural entomology informed by historicism. One of its strengths is the avoidance of what Soja criticises as 'underspatialised historicism', a failing which he, along with Michel Foucault and geocritic cum literary meta-cartographer Robert Tally, finds all too prevalent in late nineteenth-century literature and analysis of it.<sup>72</sup>

Tally's *The Geocritical Legacies of Edward Said* positions Said as 'a significant force in the development of literary geography especially in connection with the nineteenth-century novel', however Tally's 2020 essay, 'Said, Marxism and Spatiality', stresses it would be 'misleading and anachronistic to characterise Said as a geocritic'

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<sup>70</sup> Sheila Hones, *Literary Geographies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 32.

<sup>71</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indianapolis, IN and London: Indiana University Press and the British Film Institute, 1992); Robert T. Tally Jr, 'Said, Marxism and Spatiality: Wars of Position in Oppositional Criticism', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 51.1 (January 2020), 81-103.

<sup>72</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Space, Knowledge and Power', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon, 1982), pp. 239-56; Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Maskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27; Soja, *Thirdspace*, p. 174; Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); Tally, *Spatiality*. Foucault is an acknowledged influence on Soja and Said.

*per se*.<sup>73</sup> Said himself considers Orientalism to be the result of ‘imaginative geography’.<sup>74</sup> What he does in *Culture and Imperialism* is extend Williams’s spatially-aware cultural commentary and connect it with narrative representation in nineteenth-century novels, embarking on what he calls a ‘geographical enquiry into historical experience’.<sup>75</sup> In doing so, he expresses a debt to Gramsci as ‘the producer of a certain type of critical consciousness, which [Said believes] is geographical and spatial in its fundamental coordinates’.<sup>76</sup> Said demonstrates the interconnectedness of subaltern studies and postcolonialism in ‘History, Literature and Geography’, envisaging all three disciplines being concerned with ‘the *unequal* geographies of human habitation and effort’ [original emphasis].<sup>77</sup> My first chapter’s postcolonial slant on the subaltern scarab prepared the ground for this chapter’s spatially oriented investigation of the foreign, fictional insect woman.

Said notes of literature at the age of Empire: ‘most cultural historians, and certainly all literary scholars, have failed to remark the *geographical* notation, the theoretical mapping and charting of territories that underlies Western fiction, historical writing, and philosophical discourse of the time’ [original emphasis].<sup>78</sup> Foucault’s and Said’s comments on the paucity of spatiotemporal awareness in analysis of texts such as *The Beetle*, were made earlier than, or contemporaneously with, the publication of Robert Mighall’s *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*.<sup>79</sup> They were, therefore, not in a position to draw on his spatial analysis, which in 1999 somewhat re-drew the genre’s critical map with its historicist and topographical

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<sup>73</sup> Robert T. Tally Jr, ‘The World, the Text, and the Geocritic’, in *The Geocritical Legacies of Edward W. Said: Spatiality, Critical Humanism, and Comparative Literature*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1-16 (p. 2); Tally, ‘Said, Marxism etc’, 93.

<sup>74</sup> Said, ‘Orientalism Reconsidered’, 90.

<sup>75</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> Edward Said, ‘History, Literature and Geography’, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2000), pp. 453-73 (pp. 463, 467).

<sup>78</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 58.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999).

emphasis. Tally, writing a decade and a half afterwards, omits Mighall's text in the bibliography of *Spatiality*, and confesses this oversight resulted from an Americanist's ignorance of the British theoretician of Gothic spaces.<sup>80</sup> Admittedly, the term 'geocriticism' is most usually applied to the study of Modernist or Postmodern works. Although Mighall does not explicitly announce himself as a geocritic, his spatially inflected investigations into the concerns of Victorian Gothic texts 'historically and topographically significant', imply something very like it.<sup>81</sup>

French critic, Bertrand Westphal, whose work is translated into English by Tally, was an early practitioner of literary geocriticism. He is a useful guide along with Tally for the spatial investigation of Marsh's *fin-de-siècle* Gothic novel.<sup>82</sup> Westphal sets out his position in *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, and in the foreword to *Geocritical Explorations*.<sup>83</sup> For him, geocriticism is explicitly interdisciplinary and intertextual as is this thesis. Geocriticism is a natural companion to cultural entomology which blends biological concerns with literature, archaeology, art, medicine, material culture and the built environment.

Westphal identifies three fundamental concepts of geocriticism: 'spatiotemporality', adapted from Bakhtin's chronotope, the concept of time and place in combination with one another; 'transgressivity', the idea that no representation remains stable; and 'referentiality', due attention to the linkage between a work of fiction and the real world.<sup>84</sup> Application of Westphal's categories

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<sup>80</sup> Tally generously offered up this explanation in email correspondence with me on 13 May 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Mighall, p. 26.

<sup>82</sup> Westphal builds on Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis (1957), Henri Lefebvre's conceptual triad of space (1974), Michel Bakhtin's chronotope (1975), Michel Foucault's spatial investigations (1966-1982), and Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's smooth and striated space (1980); Tally's influences include Raymond Williams's cultural studies, Yi-Fu Tuan's humanist geography and topophilia, Franco Moretti's literary mapping, Edward Said's spatially-oriented postcolonialism, and Frederick Jameson's Marxist geopolitics and cognitive mapping. Tally identifies Said and Jameson occupying oppositional critical position to one another: Tally, 'Marxism and Spatiality'.

<sup>83</sup> Bertrand Westphal, 'Foreword', in *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. ix-xv; Robert T. Tally, Jr 'Textual Geographies: The Real-and-Imagined Spaces of Literature, Criticism and Theory', *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, 14.3 (2014), 1-10.

<sup>84</sup> Westphal, 'Foreword', in *Geocritical Explorations*, p. xv.

to *The Beetle* illuminates three key points. In terms of 'spatiotemporality', London and Cairo, where the story unfolds, matter just as much as when it unfolds. In terms of 'transgressivity', the shapeshifting scarab and the city she occupies fluctuate in the way they are depicted and interpreted. In terms of 'referentiality', physical locations and insect species are clearly identifiable outside Marsh's text, so that fictional and factual correspondences are in constant dialogue with one another. Geocriticism reiterates the findings of earlier chapters. *The Beetle* is influenced by a host of cultural associations and the novel in turn feeds back into them in a continually evolving process.

Postcolonialism and Orientalism are spatially inflected disciplines. The study of sympathy is also spatially inflected. The Beetle is Egyptian, and the circles of sympathy radiating horizontally outward from a presumed Western observer fade to non-existence when the object is perceived as very distant in terms of national and religious affiliations. The horizontal weakening of sympathy is compounded by the Beetle being at times an insect, which non-mammalian state distances her vertically because of her supposedly inferior species. In *Dracula*, the zoophagous maniac Renfield intends to work his way up the chain of animals to acquire progressively more sophisticated spiritual powers as he consumes them. He starts with the lowest, which are insects. Complacent readers may recoil from his entomophagy, ignorant of the fact they may regularly indulge in the practice themselves. Many of Mrs Beeton's recipes call for 'a few drops of cochineal', the natural red food colouring obtained from the carminic acid of scale bugs.<sup>85</sup> Carmine continues to be an approved additive for a wide range of foodstuffs and lipstick. In Muslim culture the insect derivative is forbidden.

Fonna Forman-Barzilai, in *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, points to the concept of radiating circles arising from what she describes as the 'concentric

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<sup>85</sup> Isabella Beeton, *Beeton's Book of Household Management* (London: S. O. Beeton Publishing, 1861).



structure' of Smith's *The Moral Sentiments*.<sup>86</sup> She finds Smith's work to be characterised by 'spatial texture of sympathetic activity' in which she identifies: 'three dimensions, or "spaces" in which sympathy takes place, (1) the physical; (2) the affective; and (3) the historical/cultural.'<sup>87</sup> Approaching the Beetle according to these criteria reveals the character occupies a proximate physical space which, because she is monstrous, worsens the almost overwhelming antipathy occurring in the affective and historical/cultural spaces. Because the three spaces are themselves three dimensional, and because the Beetle is sympathetically distanced vertically and horizontally, 'spheres' of sympathy are more useful to think with than circles. The spheres of sympathy towards the Beetle undergo subtle but continuous shifting and are dependent on the vantage point of the fictional observer or the real reader in time and space. Very occasionally they expand to embrace her, such as when an entomologist or postcolonial critic considers the Egyptian creature. Most often they contract to exclude her.

Chris Danta, in *Animal Fables after Darwin*, points to the fact that: '[o]ne of the most fundamental orientational metaphors in Western culture gives the concepts of human and animal a spatial orientation: human is up; animal is down'.<sup>88</sup> He goes on to comment on Czech writer Vilem Flusser's speculation: 'humans have incorporated into their collective unconsciousness "a hierarchy of disgust that reflects a biological hierarchy." We find something increasingly more disgusting, Flusser thinks, the further removed it is from us on the phylogenetic tree'.<sup>89</sup> Danta challenges the primacy of this vertical axis and notions of phylogenetic difference by proposing a shift occurs in the one and a shortening of the other that begins with Darwin. Only extremely rarely is the shortening of the vertical axis evident in the post-Darwinian

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<sup>86</sup> Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Forman-Barzilai, p. 20.

<sup>88</sup> Chris Danta, *Animal Fables After Darwin: Literature, Speciesism, and Metaphor* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2018), p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Danta, p. 13.

extended insect metaphor of *The Beetle*, which exploits Flusser's 'hierarchy of disgust'. If, however, Marsh's novel is situated in a London coleopterised and Orientalised, the scarab's position on the axis of desire and disgust can move.

*The Beetle* plays out in a space which is not simply a backdrop against which action unfolds sequentially. Tally argues in *Spatiality* that space is not only measurable objectively it is also ideological. Space is experienced subjectively as is every reader's experience of every book. Even visual images such as the Mercator projection of the world and the 1897 Map of Empire represent space in ways that only appear to be fixed and factual. They conceal a hidden propaganda function with a focus on the Greenwich meridian which aggrandises Britain and distorts the rest of the world. It is a point well made by Mark Monmonier in *How to Lie with Maps*.<sup>90</sup> Maps are significant for what is put in, what is left out, and what is exaggerated. This is a truism equally valid for a work of fiction. According to Tally, an author, 'even one who operates in such non-realistic modes as myth or fantasy', or, I would paraphrase 'even one who operates in such non-realistic modes as [the Gothic genre]', inevitably carries out an exercise in 'literary cartography'.<sup>91</sup>

Like the mapmaker, the writer must survey territory, determining which features of a given landscape to include, to emphasise and which to diminish; [...] must establish the scale and the shape, no less of the narrative than of the places in it.<sup>92</sup>

Richard Marsh is just such a literary cartographer. He references recognisable streets and landmarks, manipulates scales, emphasises certain features, and creates loops through the narrative that cause the reader to revisit the same ground through the eyes of different surveyors. He shapes his reader's reaction to the literary world he creates with his words. Specifically, he shapes his reader's reaction to the supersized

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<sup>90</sup> Mark Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> Tally, *Spatiality*, pp. 44-78.

<sup>92</sup> Tally, *Spatiality*, p. 45.

scarab at the centre of that world, the Egyptian woman cum insect, the out-of-scale upper-case Beetle among lower-case beetles in real-and-imagined London.

Spaces in a variety of scales, functions, gendered public or private locations, means of entry to them, and the struggle for control once within their confines, are all key in *The Beetle*, and this causes me to share Minna Vuohelainen's surprise that so few critics have concentrated on the spatial aspects of Marsh's works, an omission all the more striking in view of his 'frequent use of spatial tropes and of actual locations'.<sup>93</sup> Vuohelainen finds the Gothic genre in general to be a 'spatially articulate mode', with Marsh's fantastic fiction 'typically set against starkly modern, often realist urban and domestic backdrops'.<sup>94</sup> Marsh weaves into his plots frequent and sometimes rapid references to street names, landmarks and transport hubs, and unequivocally sites *The Beetle* and also *The House of Mystery*, *Tom Ossington's Ghost*, *The Goddess*, *A Second Coming*, and *The Joss*, to name only a fraction of his literary output, in the recognisably real geospace of London.<sup>95</sup> London emerges as a stratigraphic locus laden with cultural memory and signifiers: a palimpsest on which the author inscribes his own text as his characters navigate their way through the cityscape. *The Beetle* is not only a tale of Imperial Gothic, Racial Gothic and Egyptian Gothic as discussed earlier, it is also a tale of Urban Gothic, or more precisely, London Gothic.<sup>96</sup> Mighall comments of the genre, it is 'not just a Gothic in the city, it is a Gothic of the city.' [original emphasis].<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Minna Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), p. 17.

<sup>94</sup> Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh*, pp. 16, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Geospace indicates a space capable of being referenced in the real world; Barbara Piatti, *Die Geographie der Literatur: Schauplätze, Handlungsräume, Raumphantasien [The Geography of Literature, Theatres, Museums and Science Fiction]* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> See Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard, eds, *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination* (London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>97</sup> Mighall, p. 31.

For Soja, spatiality is synonymous with the urban.<sup>98</sup> An Urban Gothic novel such as *The Beetle* readily opens itself to a geocritical approach. The *fin-de-siècle* global city of London is informed by the imperial functions articulated in its very architecture and activities, fashions and commodities, native dwellers, and alien incomers. In *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis*, Jonathan Schneer notes how this 'richest, most cosmopolitan financial center acted like a magnet, not only for the produce of empire and the funds which facilitated its functioning, but on the peoples of the empire and the world beyond.'<sup>99</sup> Tally makes a similar observation in *Spatiality*: 'The centrifugal forces of cultural power that make possible the imperial system [...] are in some respects matched by the centripetal forces that draw everything back to a centralised hub.'<sup>100</sup> On a macro scale the metropolitan heart of Empire expands its arteries into distant places, pumping in soldiers, administrators, intellectuals and missionaries: flowing back through its veins are influences and immigrants from the colonised regions. On a micro scale in Marsh's novel, Paul Lessingham goes out to Egypt, and back comes the Beetle to London. Her threatening presence in London is fictional, but in the real world it is not altogether atypical.

London is central to *The Beetle*, and, as Schneer notes, 'imperialism is central to the city's character and its identity.'<sup>101</sup> Said observes: 'so far as the study of imperialism and culture (or Orientalism) is concerned [...] nearly every nineteenth-century writer [...] was extraordinarily well aware of the fact of empire'.<sup>102</sup> This holds true just as much for Marsh as for writers more obviously concerned with imperialism such as Rider Haggard or Joseph Conrad. The imperial psychogeography of late-Victorian London inevitably affects the writer's literary cartography as well as the

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<sup>98</sup> See Barney Warf and Santa Arias, 'Introduction', in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* eds. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 9-10 (p. 6); 'Edward Soja, 'Taking Space Personally', in *Spatial Turn*, pp. 11-35.

<sup>99</sup> Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (London: York UP, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Tally, *Spatiality*, p. 95.

<sup>101</sup> Schneer, *London 1900*, p. 13

<sup>102</sup> Said, *Orientalism*. [1978] (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 34.

reader's geocritical navigation of the text either consciously or subconsciously.<sup>103</sup> Imperialism is embedded in *The Beetle*, and it reveals itself in the interaction of Marsh's imagined characters with the physical geography of the real city.<sup>104</sup>



Figure IV:14

'Punch's Dream of Things Egyptian: So of Khedive, and Needle, and Canal'

Wood Engraving by Swain from a Drawing by John Tenniel from *Punch's Almanacks Second Series 1862-1880* © Punch

The political space of the Houses of Parliament within which foreign policy is determined, and the commercial space of Limehouse docklands into which produce from Empire is imported, are the sites of Lessingham's life and Holt's death. Along from the Palace of Westminster where Lessingham is star orator, and visible from Westminster Bridge where he declares his love for Marjorie Lindon, stands Cleopatra's Needle. The Egyptian obelisk had been erected in 1878, coincidentally the

<sup>103</sup> Debord defines psychogeography as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals', Guy-Ernest Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', trans. by Ken Knabb *Lèvres Nues* 6 (September 1955), <<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

<sup>104</sup> Imperial exhibitions were regularly staged at Earl's Court, London. Only three years before *The Beetle* and explicitly referred to by a cabman in the text was the 1894 Exhibition celebrating the Orient, Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 234.

same time as Lessingham's youthful visit to Cairo.<sup>105</sup> It is flanked by sphinxes, a motif stereotypically emblematic of hybridity and mystery. London is Orientalised, and this is epitomised in John Tenniel's sketch shown in Figure IV:14. Britannia and a female embodiment of Egypt mirror each other in a ritualistic dance at the base of Cleopatra's Needle. Darwin explains his theory of evolution to an Egyptian in a loincloth carrying a scroll with the legend 'Races of Man'. At the bottom right, surveying the whole scene, are two erect scarab beetles.

Egyptomania gripped *fin-de-siècle* London: an Egyptian structure stood on the embankment of its river; Egyptian artefacts including a huge granite scarab were displayed in the national museum; the Egyptian question was on the lips of its citizens and Egyptian cigarettes were breathed into their lungs.<sup>106</sup> Even in death Egypt was unavoidable. Neo-Pharaonic designs shaped tombs and populated cemeteries where mini obelisks and gravestones intermingled, and the western part of Highgate Cemetery boasted an entire Egyptian Avenue.<sup>107</sup> In Piccadilly, one of the most prominent buildings was the Egyptian Hall. A photograph from the late 1890s in Figure IV:15 shows the twin figures of Isis and Osiris surmounting the entrance with a winged scarab spread above them. It was in situ for the whole of Victoria's reign, and in 1888 housed an exhibition of Petrie's Mummy portraits which received extensive media coverage.<sup>108</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century the venue had come to be known as 'England's Home of Mystery' through its staged illusions and pastiches of

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<sup>105</sup> The original proposition was for the obelisk to stand in front of the Houses of Parliament, but the Directors of the Metropolitan District Railway objected on safety grounds. See Bob Brier, *Cleopatra's Needles: The Lost Obelisks of Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 126-56.

<sup>106</sup> British troops stationed in Egypt from 1882 developed a taste for the local cigarettes causing the tobacco industry to boom. Around the turn of the century, Britain was importing Egyptian cigarettes in significant numbers. Wilde smoked gold-tipped ones, Boothby's Pharos produced them, and in Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez* [1905] Professor Corum gets through one thousand per fortnight. See Relli Schechter, 'Selling Luxury: The Rise of the Egyptian Cigarette and the Transformation of the Egyptian Tobacco Market, 1850-1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35.1 (February 2003), 51-75; Brier, *Egyptomania*, pp. 13, 104.

<sup>107</sup> This architectural feature dating back to 1839 now has Grade 1 listed status.

<sup>108</sup> Edward Walford, 'Regent Street and Piccadilly', in *Old and New London*, 4 vols (London, 1878), IV, pp. 246-62. At the time of writing, the same portraits are on display at the Petrie Museum, London.

spiritualist demonstrations performed to a credulous populace.<sup>109</sup> As *The Beetle* bestseller took possession of multiple readers' minds, the Egyptian Hall conspired with it to cement the link between Egypt, mesmerism, magic and uncanny acts.



Figure IV:15

The Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly,  
London (c.1895-1900)

© Museum of London

Architectural features inspired by Egypt occupied London's thoroughfares. Paintings inspired by Egypt plastered the walls of its galleries, so much so that Ruskin despaired: 'Are we never to get out of Egypt any more?'<sup>110</sup> In art, Egypt was inescapable thematically and integrally. Oil paintings frequently utilise Egyptian linseed oil as a binding agent, and the rich brown pigment in works might have been obtained from ground-up mummy flesh, graphically named 'Mummy Brown'.<sup>111</sup> On making the horrified discovery of the cadaverous component in his tube of paint, Edward Burne-Jones buried it with attendant funeral rites witnessed by a youthful Rudyard Kipling.<sup>112</sup> To study a painting even now is potentially to partake in ocular

<sup>109</sup> Mayes, Ronald, 'The Romance of London's Theatres: No 87 The Egyptian Hall', *The Arthur Lloyd Music Hall and Theatre History Site* <<http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/EgyptianHallPiccadilly.htm>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>110</sup> John Ruskin and Sir Edward Tyas Cook, 'Academy Notes: Notes on Prout and Hunt', quoted in Lynn Thornton, 'Orientalism in Victorian Painting', Victorian Web, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/orientalist/thornton1.html>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>111</sup> Kate Nicholls, 'A Global History of Victorian Painting: Methods, Challenges and Implications', *New Directions in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Art*, online seminar 07 September 2020. Mummy Brown continued to be sold until as recently as 1964.

<sup>112</sup> Victoria Finlay, *The Brilliant History of Color in Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2014), p. 82; Philip, McCouat, 'The Life and Death of Mummy Brown', *Journal of Art in Society* <<http://www.artinsociety.com/the-life-and-death-of-mummy-brown.html>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

consumption of human remains in its browns and of insect extracts in its reds. Marsh's Beetle infiltrates the very canvases. She mutely defies the hypocrisy of cannibalistic voyeurs who condemn her and the followers of Isis.

At the approach to the *fin de siècle*, the luxurious decadence of the East in fine art and the public imagination was reinforced by an expanding number of vast city department stores containing romanticised, orientalist marketplaces.<sup>113</sup> Liberty & Co. contained a basement in its Regent Street store known as the 'Eastern Bazaar', catering to customers eager to purchase embroidery, rugs, furniture and *objets d'art*.<sup>114</sup> Numerous other fashionable emporia such as Whiteleys in Bayswater, and Debenham and Freebody's in Wigmore Street, also exploited widespread Orientalist fervour. Émile Zola captures the craze in *The Ladies' Paradise*, where society women in the thrall of mesmerised acquisitiveness describe a store's oriental saloon in glowing terms: 'Superb—wonderful!', 'extraordinary', 'Oh! Delicious! makes you think you are in the East; doesn't it?'.<sup>115</sup> Even in this pocket of gorgeous exoticism there is an authorial hint of something heady and slightly unpleasant in the carpets. 'Visions of the East floated beneath the luxury of this barbarous art, amid the strong odour which the old wools had retained of the country of vermin and of the rising sun.'<sup>116</sup> Zola invokes Khepri's role as embodiment of the morning sun and the insect's looser associations with verminousness. He recognises what is also identifiable in Marsh: the ambivalence of Oriental splendour behind which lie unsavoury aspects such as un-

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<sup>113</sup> Hoberman, 'Turn of the Century Shopper'; Rudi Laermans, 'Learning to Consume: Early Department Stores and the Shaping of Modern Consumer Culture (1860-1914)', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10.4 (November 1993), 79-102.

<sup>114</sup> 'The History of Liberty Department Store', <<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/england/london/articles/the-history-of-liberty-department-store-in-one-minute/>> [accessed 08 July 2021]; Liberty's Catalogue, *The Bazaar* (1898), cited by Sarah Cheang, 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store', *Journal of Design History*, 20.1 (Spring 2007), 1-16 (p. 10).

<sup>115</sup> Émile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise: A Realistic Novel* [translated without amendment from the French edition] (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1886), pp. 92, 93, 104. Early chapters of Marsh's *The Joss* echo Zola's depiction of constrained living conditions of department-store employees.

<sup>116</sup> Zola, *Ladies' Paradise*, p. 79.



Christian practices. But there also exist other unsavoury aspects and these stem from poverty, exploitative commercialism, and imperialism.

Within the pages of Marsh's bestseller is an awareness of the opinion held by some of his contemporaries of a hierarchy of races with white Europeans at the top, and peoples from Africa and the East much lower down. Consumers of Oriental art or material objects might have prized their exotic qualities and derived sensual gratification from them, but never translated this into admiration of the foreign people who crafted those same goods. Barney Warf and Santa Arias highlight the spatiotemporal element of Orientalism.

Orientalist thought structured the Western geographical imagination such that the distance from Europe became equated with increasingly more primitive stages of development, conflating continents with races in terms that were hierarchically organised in their degree or alleged degree of temporal progress. In this way did historicism eclipse space in the service of imperial thought: beyond Europe was *before Europe* [original emphasis].<sup>117</sup>

According to this mode of thinking, the Beetle as North African, female and insect, is an atavistic form distanced from the perfect ideal, but even Marsh's Londoners are not all at the top of the imagined ladder. Notwithstanding they live and operate within the same city, they occupy graded positions on the vertical axis of social hierarchy. Status dictates the neighbourhood they inhabit and results in what Tally deems a 'spatial organisation' of dwellings ranging from the porticoed mansion in Belgravia where Lessingham lives to the disreputable East End lodging house where Holt dies.<sup>118</sup> Spaces and places are key to the novel, and Marsh uses them with subtlety, not presenting a simplistically divided London where west is best. It is after all in a western

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<sup>117</sup> Warf and Arias, 'Introduction', p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Tally, *Spatiality*, p.14. Charles Booth's original hand-coloured poverty maps from his *Maps Descriptive of London Poverty 1898-9* second edition use 1897 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 maps as their base <<https://booth.lse.ac.uk/learn-more/download-maps>> [accessed 13 July 2021].

suburb between Hammersmith and Walham Green where the Beetle resides.<sup>119</sup> Nor does Marsh imply a person's place within physical and anthropological constructions is permanently fixed. Movement between spaces drives the plot.

The Egyptian Beetle crosses national and geographic boundaries, quitting the *Rue de Rabagas* in the Egyptian capital for Convolvulus Avenue in the English capital.<sup>120</sup> *Rabagas* (the name of her erstwhile Cairene street) is the title of a five-act satire on unprincipled politicians by Victorien Sardou, performed in London at the Vaudeville in 1872, followed by Stephen Fiske's 1875 adaptation at St. James's Theatre.<sup>121</sup> In the play's second act Rabagas justifies saving a ferocious murderer from the law. Young Lessingham strays into Rabagas's territory geographically in the francophone name of the street and thematically in excusing his own ferocious murderousness.

In Cairo, the Beetle sings the French song '*La p'tite Voyageuse*' ('The Little Female Traveller'), which is what she herself becomes.<sup>122</sup> With rug and bedcovers, accent and clothing, beliefs and mythologies, she Egyptianises an English suburban house. Her uncanny rental property is in Convolvulus Avenue, named for the shrub commonly known as 'bindweed' and 'morning glory', and laden with floriographic meaning. The first summons up an invasive botanical species that causes an inability to move, and the second, the rising sun in the East. The Beetle binds Holt to her service, and as Khepri, she symbolises the daily rebirth in the morning sun's glory. It is unlikely Marsh randomly allocates names to streets or characters, and so it is worth being alert to their implications. The politician of somewhat dubious morals has a name beginning with 'Less', which is self-explanatory. Robert Holt is forced to commit

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<sup>119</sup> Marsh would go on to create Sam Briggs, inhabitant of Acacia Villa, Walham Green, junior clerk and first-person narrator of twenty-three stories, *Strand Magazine* (1904-15). See Minna Vuohelainen, 'Introduction' in M. Vuohelainen, ed., *The Complete Adventures of Sam Briggs, by Richard Marsh* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2013), pp. vii-xxvii.

<sup>120</sup> This is the address of Miss Louisa Coleman, from whom the Beetle rents the house across the road, Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 244.

<sup>121</sup> Jerome A. Hart, *Sardou and the Sardou Plays* (Philadelphia PA and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1913).

<sup>122</sup> Marsh, *Beetle* p. 209. The French noun reveals the traveller to be feminine.

the robbery of Marjorie's letters after his freewill is brought to a halt. Most tellingly of all, Marjorie Lindon, possession of whose body and soul is fiercely contested between Beetle, Statesman and Scientist, has a surname that differs from London by only one vowel. Schmitt's study of Gothic's 'shifting mutual articulations' of gender and nation notes: 'threatened femininity comes to stand in metonymically for the English nation itself [or its capital...] a generalisation of Gothic narrative with imperial as well as domestic consequences'.<sup>123</sup> Lindon/London is at risk from the mysterious East.

Lessingham decorates his study with souvenirs obtained from colonial intrusion and cultural theft. These are material reminders of his travels which are under his control. He is significantly less happy to be transported to his past by what James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* describes as the 'sympathetic magic' of the Beetle's photogravure or the mere utterance of her name.<sup>124</sup> On the trelliswork of Lessingham's Lowndes Square portico is a climbing plant linking him to the *Convolvulus* genus, indicative of his status as a social and political climber. He is on the rise and has an aversion to being dragged backwards and downwards.

Holt's trajectory even before the start of the novel is down. Loss of employment has robbed him of a permanent abode. When even the workhouse denies him entry, he is condemned to tramp the streets, a dispossessed entity with an empty belly, a blank space open to being filled by the Beetle. He wanders away from Hammersmith and experiences what Julian Wolfreys calls a 'defamiliarisation of the self in relation to location'.<sup>125</sup> The sensation is exacerbated through pathetic fallacy as he makes his uncertain way and his surroundings become equated with a

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<sup>123</sup> Cannon Schmitt, *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1997), p. 2. Schmitt acknowledges the longstanding influence of Brantlinger on his research.

<sup>124</sup> J. G. Frazer referred to the phenomenon of 'sympathetic magic' in various iterations of his study of comparative religion, mythology and superstition, *The Golden Bough*.

<sup>125</sup> Julian Wolfreys, 'The Hieroglyphic Other: *The Beetle*, London and the Anxieties of Late Imperial England', in *Writing London: Inventions of the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 8-36 (p. 24).

more primitive existence spatially and temporally. 'In the darkness and the rain, the locality which I was entering appeared unfinished. I seemed to be leaving civilisation behind me [...] Exactly where I was I could not tell'.<sup>126</sup> Hampered by weakness, misery and poor visibility, Holt is no longer in a part of London knowable to him. His spatial co-ordinates have gone awry, his mental map is blurred to indistinctness, and he suffers what is in Tally's terminology, acute 'cartographic anxiety'.<sup>127</sup>

He is in a peripheral place where metropolitan structures are degenerating, and scattered piles of bricks are the raw material for new development. Laura Baker Whelan discovers in such cityscapes a trope of late-Victorian literature. 'Ruinous suburbanisation presented as something that opened a gateway to "other worlds"'.<sup>128</sup> These 'other worlds' of *The Beetle* are not only uncertain futures, but reincarnated pasts and parallel supernatural presents, a phenomenon Gaston Bachelard expounds in *The Poetics of Space*. 'In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time'.<sup>129</sup> It is an analogy applicable to Marsh's liminal edgeland where the carbon dioxide of a decaying past is being exchanged for the oxygen of uncertain futures.<sup>130</sup> As a remnant of Ancient Egyptian paganism and herald of modern Arab vengeance, there is appropriateness to the Beetle making her lair in this time-compressing location.

Minna Vuohelainen's monograph on Marsh positions *The Beetle* along with *The Goddess* and *The Joss* as an Urban Gothic tale constituting a counter-discourse to 'the nineteenth-century ideal of the well-governed city, controlled by a panoptic, disciplinary machinery'.<sup>131</sup> In this she echoes Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*

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<sup>126</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 10.

<sup>127</sup> Robert T. Tally Jr, 'Topophrenia: The Place of the Subject', *Introduction to Spatial Literary Studies II: Problematics of Place*, 14.4 (2014), 1-10; Tally, *Spatiality*, p.1; Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), especially pp. 70-73.

<sup>128</sup> Laura Baker Whelan, *Class, Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 99.

<sup>129</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>130</sup> The concept of 'edgelands' was first adopted by the geographer, Marion Shoard. These liminal spaces are extensively explored in Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*. (London: Vintage, 2012).

<sup>131</sup> Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh*, p. 17.

that the panoptic principle is 'the utopia of a perfectly governed city'.<sup>132</sup> The Panopticon as a mechanism for social control was conceived of by Jeremy Bentham in 1785 so inmates at an institution would feel under constant observation by a single omniscient guard and consequently behave as though that authority figure were always watching them.<sup>133</sup> Holt believes himself ever to be under the Beetle's overbearing surveillance, which, if she is flying above his head, may of course actually be true. Using Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* as a touchstone, Vuohelainen identifies Marsh's London as 'an "imageable" city of famous landmarks and recognisable paths', subject to ostensibly well-intentioned and well-ordered planning and capable of being overseen by beneficent authority figures, and yet, Vuohelainen goes on to say, 'at key points in each narrative, characters lose their way in the hostile, alien cityscape where, apparently, only the monster can be fully at home.'<sup>134</sup> This is an important statement which I shall develop further.

As has been noted by Wolfreys and Vuohelainen, Holt's disoriented night-time wanderings through London's streets darkly mirror those of youthful Lessingham through Cairo's native quarter, although there is a difference between Holt tramping out of desperation and Lessingham strolling for diversion. What Lessingham experiences is the not uncommon disorientation of a stranger on foreign territory. What Holt endures is a sensation of estrangement in his native city. However, this alienation is brought about, as Wolfreys rightly asserts, 'not through any agency of the Beetle'.<sup>135</sup> While she may opportunistically colonise the failing man's mind and body, she is not responsible for them having been wiped out in the first place. Holt's freefall through the social hierarchy has already unfixed his economic, domestic, and

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<sup>132</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 198.

<sup>133</sup> The etymology of Panopticon comes from the Greek παν- ('all') and -οπτικός ('seeing'); University College London, 'The Panopticon' <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/who-was-jeremy-bentham/panopticon>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>134</sup> Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh* p. 17. See Schmitt: 'The English are displaced figuratively if not physically [...] England itself becomes an alien nation', *Alien Nation*, p.3.

<sup>135</sup> Wolfreys, 'Hieroglyphic Other', pp. 16-17.

cartographic certainty. He is a victim of the city. The 'monster', in Vuohelainen's words, is able to 'master' it.<sup>136</sup>

At the heart of Empire the out-of-work, London clerk is literally and figuratively lost. The colonised subject navigates herself and others with ease, driving the mesmerised man with amazing rapidity straight from the suburban no-man's-land to Lessingham's home. Wolfreys contends Marsh's novel, the creature at the centre of it, and the city at a crisis point of Empire together form a triad of encrypted forms. He argues that the city and the Beetle are both hieroglyphic texts, similarly monstrous, mutating, and indecipherable, and he points to a sympathetic resemblance between them. I view it slightly differently. To the Beetle, London is far from indecipherable. It is not the inexplicable and impenetrable city which Mighall identifies in G. W. M. Reynolds, *The Mysteries of London*. The scarab finds it a comprehensible space.

Earthbound 'ordinary practitioners of the city', according to Michel De Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 'follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it'.<sup>137</sup> The Beetle is very much able to read the city and her metamorphic ability to shift from human to insect enables her to do so because she is reading from above. *Johnson's Natural History* notes, Lamellicorn beetles, of which the *Scarabaeus aegyptiorum* is one, 'fly well, but heavily, with a loud whirring noise', and this accords perfectly with the sound heard by Marjorie Lindon in her bedroom.<sup>138</sup> On the Beetle's 'apotheosis', Atherton anticipates her flying: 'I expected every moment to see it take wing and circle through the air'; 'it began to unsheath its wings [...] Its wings opened wide; obviously it was about to rise'.<sup>139</sup> It was common knowledge scarab beetles could fly as they are shown doing on De Morgan's plate, but just to make sure his readers are clear, the author has his entomologist reiterate it. Marsh's Beetle metamorphoses into a winged insect and so acquires the

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<sup>136</sup> Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh* p. 25.

<sup>137</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Randall (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> Goodrich, *Johnson's Natural History*, p. 547.

<sup>139</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 117.

gift of flight that offers a Beetle's-eye overview of streets and districts, landmarks, and transport hubs. Under her panoptic gaze, Secondspace London reveals itself to be the Firstspace of Stanford's detailed 1897 map.<sup>140</sup> Figure IV:16 reproduces the full map in miniature spanning the area from Kentish Town to Bethnal Green and from Clapham Common to Chiswick. The detail shows Lowndes Square, home of Paul Lessingham. To possess this level of information through aerial knowledge not available to others is to achieve a shift in power relations. The centre of the British Empire becomes the territory of the Beetle.<sup>141</sup> The apotheosis of the Egyptian woman into a supernatural scarab gives her physical wings, and these insect attributes enable her in the words of De Certeau: 'to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god'.<sup>142</sup>

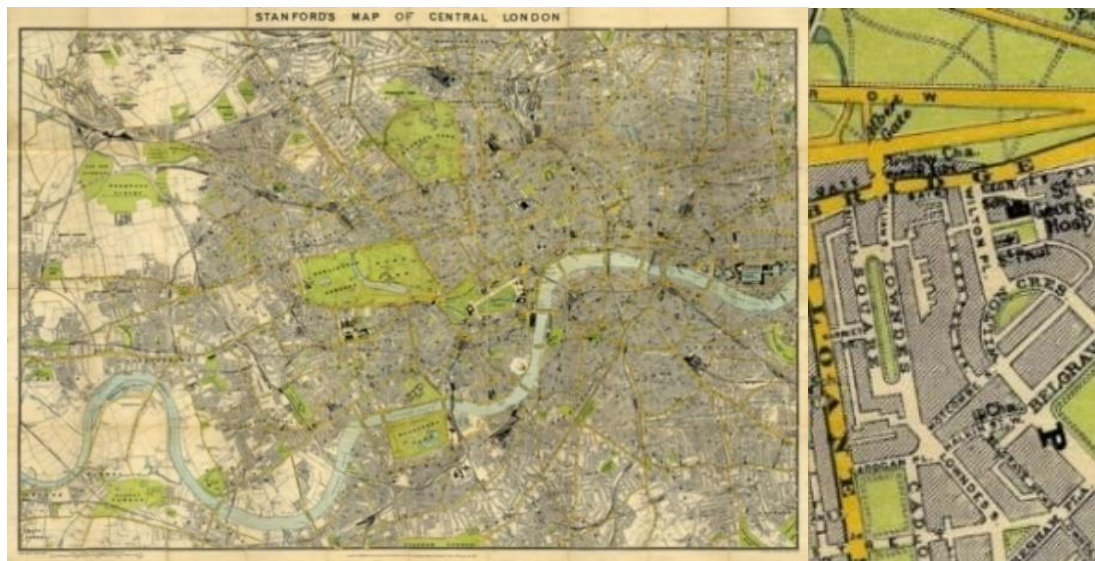


Figure IV:16

Left: Stanford's 1897 Map of London - Right: Detail Showing Lowndes Square

<sup>140</sup> Stanford's Map of Central London 1897: 40 inches x 27 inches / 101cm x 68cm [Four inches to one mile] (MAPCO: Map and Plan Collection Online < <http://mapco.net/london.htm> > [accessed 08 July 2021]).

<sup>141</sup> Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

<sup>142</sup> De Certeau, pp. 92-93.

Unbeknownst to prescient Marsh, recent discoveries reveal the unsurpassed navigational skills of dung beetles. By day, they orient themselves by the sun using special photoreceptors in their eyes to detect symmetrical patterns of polarised light.<sup>143</sup> By night, they use celestial clues such as moonlight and even the Milky Way. According to new information in *Current Biology*, they are the first known in the animal kingdom to operate this way, and it is another indicator why the Beetle's species is so significant.<sup>144</sup> Whether the Beetle is interpreted as a map-reading human, a panoptic shapeshifting Beetle/woman hybrid or as an instinctive insect, her wayfinding abilities are unsurpassed.

The Beetle's range stretches from London's western suburbs to its East End docklands, and from south of the Thames to mainline stations for trains to the north.<sup>145</sup> Because she occupies multiple locations in rapid succession, the same Beetle 'over, and over, and over', cumulatively this gives the impression she constitutes the type of invasion characterised in popular cartoons. Fear of the potato-devastating Colorado beetles had led to the Destructive Insects Act (1877), and figure IV:17, attributed to *Punch*, portrays the entomological threat conflated into one exaggeratedly large insect.<sup>146</sup> Figure IV:18 is a Linley Sambourne 1897 *Punch* cartoon entitled 'A Guildhall Nightmare', in which massed insects representing 'Africa [...] the plague of the Foreign Office', invade the sanctity of Lord Salisbury's bed.<sup>147</sup> Marsh's

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<sup>143</sup> Christine Dell' Amore, 'Dung Beetles Navigate Via the Milky Way, First Known in Animal Kingdom', *National Geographic* (24 January 2013) < <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2013/01/24/dung-beetles-navigate-via-the-milky-way-first-known-in-animal-kingdom/> > [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>144</sup> Marie Dacke, Emily Baird, Marcus Byrne, Clark H. Scholtz and Eric J. Warrant, 'Dung Beetles Use the Milky Way for Orientation', *Current Biology*, 23.4 (24 January 2013), 298-300.

<sup>145</sup> Minna Vuohelainen plots the movements of the Beetle, the Goddess, and the Joss on a single map. See Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh*, p. 29.

<sup>146</sup> The Destructive Insects Act (1877) was only invoked once in forty years until its amendment; J. F. M. Clark, 'Beetle Mania: The Colorado Beetle Scare of 1877', *History Today*, 42.12 (December 1992), 5-7. (p. 5).

<sup>147</sup> The cartoon references a speech given by Lord Salisbury at the Lord Mayor's Banquet on 09 November 1897. *Punch* Archive Galleries, 'A Guildhall Nightmare', <<https://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000fZMCtMMv2zQ>> [accessed 08 July 2021].



Beetle, although suggestive of the cartoons, is a single shapeshifter, not an advance scout prior to military incursion and not an infestation.

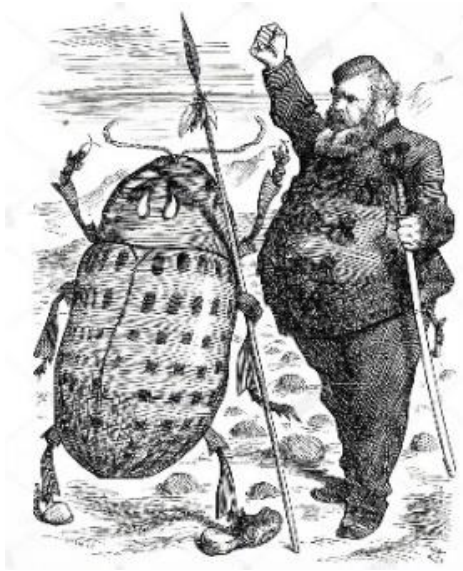


Figure IV:17

Cartoon Challenge to the Colorado Beetle  
(1877)

Attributed to *Punch*, World History Archive

Figure IV:18

Edward Linley Sambourne,  
'A Guildhall Nightmare'  
*Punch* (November 1897)

© *Punch*



The Beetle's residence is rented, sparsely furnished and impermanent. Her personal effects are comprised of only as much as can be carried in an enormous bundle on her head, visually reminiscent of Khepri with his spherical burden. The transient nature of her existence calls into question the appropriateness of Vuohelainen's genre categorisation of Marsh's novel as 'invasion Gothic' or Tim Youngs's assertion: '*The Beetle* has much in common with *Dracula*: it is a type of

invasion narrative that exhibits reverse colonisation from the East.’<sup>148</sup> Unlike Dracula whom Stephen Arata dubs ‘The Occidental Tourist’, and about whom the west experiences ‘the Anxiety of Reverse Colonisation’, Marsh’s Beetle does not threaten creation of a plague of creatures like herself unless, as posited in my previous chapter, anxiety about this outcome were to emanate from a zoologically unfounded fear of her releasing multiple fertilised ova.<sup>149</sup>

The Beetle’s fixed-term rental of the premises at Convolvulus Avenue does not constitute an invasion narrative or ‘reverse colonisation’ as Vuohelainen or Youngs or Mighall would have it. Said’s definition of imperialism and colonialism in *Culture and Imperialism* provides clarification:<sup>150</sup>

“imperialism” means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; “colonialism”, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on a distant territory.<sup>151</sup>

The Beetle is not implanting a settlement or making a bid for widespread control of England’s assets or population. Her presence is a visitation rather than invasion. She stands in stark contrast to Rider Haggard’s Ayesha and the prospect which dismays Leo and Holly of her overthrowing Queen Victoria and usurping control.

The terrible *She* had evidently made up her mind to go to England, and it made me absolutely shudder to think what would be the result of her arrival there. What her powers were I knew, and I could not doubt but that she would exercise them to the full [...] what was there to stop her? In the end she would, I had little doubt, assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Vuohelainen, ‘ “You know not of what you speak” ’, pp. 312-30; Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh*, p. 21; Youngs, *Beastly Journeys*, p. 85.

<sup>149</sup> Stephen D. Arata, ‘The Occidental Tourist: “Dracula” and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization’, *Victorian Studies*, 33.4 (Summer, 1990), 621-45.

<sup>150</sup> Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh*, pp. 21, 39, 73; Youngs, p. 85; Mighall, p. 138.

<sup>151</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 8.

<sup>152</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure* (London: Longmans Green and Co, 1888), p. 224.

Schmitt observes of *She* and *The Beetle*, how both texts 'exploit the fear of an invasion of Britain by a monstrous femininity originating beyond the pale of an occidental Europe understood as normative'.<sup>153</sup> The fear is indeed exploited, but *The Beetle* has no aggressive imperialist agenda.

Preceding chapters in this thesis argued along with Boehmer and Said that the business of imperial expansion politically, administratively, and militaristically, is essentially a male enterprise while Orientalist discourse tends to construct the lands and peoples to be conquered and controlled as essentially feminine. *The Beetle* shares a gendered female identity with the mysterious East, that subaltern Orient which in the late-nineteenth Century was 'not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other'.<sup>154</sup> Gendering of space is an idea conceptualised by feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey in *Space, Place and Gender*.<sup>155</sup> The spaces of Marsh's text are (narrowing down from the broadest to the most intimate) global, national, metropolitan, neighbourhood, domestic and personal. In many cases they can be viewed as gendered. Lessingham's chief locations are overwhelmingly masculine. The private sanctum of his study and the publicly visible Houses of Parliament are both sealed off from women. In the former, Marjorie's letters are literally locked away, and in the latter, she is only permitted to watch proceedings silently from the 'Ladies Cage'.<sup>156</sup> Atherton's laboratory is a private male space at the service of a male government even though his monarch is feminine. Marjorie and Dora Grayling visit it on sufferance, though Dora with persistence and cash is poised to seize control and relocate it. Most clearly positioned as feminine is the bedroom, the intimate inner space defined by its key piece of furniture, the bed. According to Georges Perec in *Species of Spaces*, the bed is 'the elementary space of the body', the site of birth,

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<sup>153</sup> Schmitt, *Alien Nation*, p. 19.

<sup>154</sup> Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', 93.

<sup>155</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>156</sup> The first woman MP, Nancy Astor was not elected until 1919.

death, copulation, violation, illness, and repose.<sup>157</sup> The Beetle controls all these activities bar birth. Her monstrosity prevents her from birthing anything other than her insect self.

The room in the suburbs which Holt enters by the window is effectively a bedroom since it contains little else apart from the rug on the floor and the bed made up of more rugs. It is a sumptuous and tempting space that Vuohelainen, perhaps influenced by Hurley or Atherton in enlisting the vocabulary of the female reproductive system, describes as 'the monster's warm, softly carpeted, womb-like mantrap'.<sup>158</sup> Marsh introduces a second bed when Holt is discovered collapsed in the street, and Marjorie brings him into her home. In a *déjà-vu* scene she assesses him just as he once observed the Egyptian, and the mirroring is enhanced by Holt speaking in an approximation of the Beetle's voice as if the sick man provides a point of entry for the supernatural shapeshifter. The 1897 *Academy* reviewer of the novel understands the subtle point: *scarabaei* can 'make their way into places which they would be unable to enter in human form.'<sup>159</sup> To become an insect is not only for the Beetle to be able to fly above city streets, but also to gain access to city interiors.

Later that same night, Marjorie retires to her own bed and is horrified to find her inner space infiltrated by the, to her, genderless Beetle. 'I could hear the whirring of its wings; I could hear its droning in the air'.<sup>160</sup> Her encounter with the insect is initially what Collignon calls 'a sonic event'.<sup>161</sup> 'The insectile is aural, not necessarily a visual phenomenon: it is cacophony, noise, murmur'.<sup>162</sup> Collignon's observation is pertinent to a novel in which sight of the scarab often plays a minimal part compared

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<sup>157</sup> Georges Perec, 'Species of Spaces', in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, ed. and trans. by John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 2008), pp. 1-96 (p. 16).

<sup>158</sup> Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh*, p. 69.

<sup>159</sup> Anon, 'Reviews', *Academy* (30 October 1897), 98-99.

<sup>160</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 134.

<sup>161</sup> Fabienne Collignon, 'The Insectile *Informe*', *Extrapolation*, 60.3 (2019), 229-48 (p. 229).

<sup>162</sup> Collignon, p. 234.

to aural and haptic senses. Recounting her awful experience, Marjorie intensively focuses on the buzzing noise generated by the insect.

The buzzing was distinctly audible. It was like the humming of a bee. Or—could it be a beetle?

My whole life long I have had an antipathy to beetles [...] I could hear it all the time, but see it—never! The buzzing sound was continually behind.

[...] I hid my face in the bedclothes, cramming my fingers into my ears. But the buzzing was behind me all the time [...]

[...] the buzzing always came from a point at which, at the moment, I was not aiming [...]

As I cowered beneath the bedclothes I heard the buzzing sound above my head—the sudden silence of the darkness had rendered it more audible than it had been before. The thing, whatever it was, was hovering above the bed.<sup>163</sup>

Collignon identifies the insectile onomatopoeia functioning as a 'figuration of the outside'.<sup>164</sup> In Marsh the insectile is an audible alien entity. It is an Other that ought to remain outside the country, outside the metropolitan centre, outside the domestic sphere, but which imposes itself into the interior by crawling up the bed, finding a gap in the sheets and getting in. To quote Steven Connor, Marjorie's encounter with the Beetle is 'as entomate as intimate could pinchably be.'<sup>165</sup>

For the English woman with a lifelong 'antipathy to beetles', there is no barring entry to the creature with whom, the reader later discovers, Lessingham spent two months in the first bedroom chronologically speaking, albeit fourth in the narrative structure.<sup>166</sup> Schmitt notes: 'Foreignness, so vociferously defended against, penetrates English domestic space literally and figuratively — a penetration that then serves as the rationale for still more urgent attempts to ensure national purity.'<sup>167</sup> The

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<sup>163</sup> Marsh, *Beetle* pp. 173-75.

<sup>164</sup> Collignon, 230.

<sup>165</sup> Steven Connor, 'As Entomate as Intimate Could Pinchably Be'. Connor is referencing James Joyce. <<http://stevenconnor.com/insects.html>> [accessed 25 June 2021].

<sup>166</sup> Marsh, *Beetle* p. 174.

<sup>167</sup> Schmitt, *Alien Nation*, p. 14.

‘noxious insect’ from Cairo, her fiancé’s former sexual partner, penetrates Marjorie’s intimate space. ‘The thought that a great, winged beetle—to me, a flying beetle is the horror of horrors! —was with me in my bedroom,—goodness alone knew how it had got there!—was unendurable.’<sup>168</sup>

I touched earlier on the implicit Lesbian deflowering of Marjorie by the Beetle, but now suggest penetration of her body may be doomed to occur at a microbial level as venereal infection. On the couch in the Egyptian den, having repeated and presumably unprotected sexual intercourse with a woman whose body may already have been used and abused by colonial masters or religious leaders, Lessingham might have become exposed to syphilis, a highly contagious disease to be brought back to London along with his souvenirs and guilty past and passed on to his innocent wife. His time in Cairo he recalls as ‘one of mirage, of delusion, of disease’.<sup>169</sup> A speculative, ‘colonial syphilophobia’ reading of *The Beetle* such as that of Kristen J. Davis begins to relocate the novel within the realms of contagion Gothic.<sup>170</sup> In that scenario, Lessingham would be worthy of condemnation, not the Egyptian woman who is scapegoated as ‘sexually excessive, deviant and polluting [...] libidinous, dangerous and contaminating’.<sup>171</sup> If the Beetle is indeed ‘afflicted by some terrible disease’, suffering secondary stage symptoms that cause her to be bedbound in Book I, surely she is entitled to be pitied.<sup>172</sup>

The momentary diversion to discuss hypothetical microscopic attributes of the Beetle is not intended to detract from her key feature, which is abnormally large size. She is out of scale with her surroundings, not just a pest in the wrong place, she is an impossible insect that occupies too much space. Put simply she is a bug that is much

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<sup>168</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 174.

<sup>169</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 45.

<sup>170</sup> Kristen J. Davis, ‘Colonial Syphilophobia: Sexual Deviance and Disease in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*’, *Gothic Studies* 20.1 (May 2018), 140-54. Davis is building on the term ‘syphilophobia’ used by Elaine Showalter in *Sexual Anarchy*.

<sup>171</sup> Davis, pp. 141, 144.

<sup>172</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 19.

too big. Geneticist and evolutionary biologist, J. B. S. Haldane explains in his 1926 essay 'On Being the Right Size' why insects cannot be anything other than small:

while vertebrates carry the oxygen from the gills or lungs all over the body in the blood, insects take air directly to every part of their body by tiny blind tubes called tracheae which open to the surface at many different points [...] oxygen has to penetrate the finer branches by means of diffusion. Gases can diffuse easily through very small distances [...] But when such vast journeys—from the point of view of a molecule—as a quarter of an inch have to be made, the process becomes slow. So the portions of an insect's body more than a quarter of an inch from the air would always be short of oxygen. In consequence hardly any insects are much more than half an inch thick.<sup>173</sup>

Perturbed by similar considerations to Haldane, biologist, Donna Bozzone complains about the implausibility of giant insects in film and fiction.<sup>174</sup> May Berenbaum does the same in *Bugs in the System*, and Richard J. Leskosky in 'Size Matters'.<sup>175</sup> Bozzone's essay, 'What's Bugging Me?', chiefly refers to Kafka's Gregor Samsa, but her comments are also applicable to the Beetle:

even though I can suspend disbelief regarding the transformation itself, thus allowing the story to move forward, it does not mean that permission has been granted to pile up improbability upon impossibility. Once the rules are made—this man is now an insect—biological and physical constraints can't be ignored [...]

Despite their attributes, insects are also limited [...] If the body with its exoskeleton were to scale up to human size, it would be so heavy that even appropriately sized legs and musculature could not support it.

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<sup>173</sup> J. B. S. Haldane, 'On Being the Right Size', <<http://www.phys.ufl.edu/courses/phy3221/spring10/HaldaneRightSize.pdf>> [accessed 08 July 2021] 2020].

<sup>174</sup> Donna Bozzone, 'What's Bugging Me (About Kafka's *Metamorphosis*)?' <<https://studyres.com/doc/15184487/what-s-bugging-me--about-kafka-s-metamorphosis-%3F>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>175</sup> May Berenbaum, *Bugs in the System: Insects and their Impact on Human Affairs* (Reading Mass: Addison Wesley, 1995); Richard J. Leskosky, 'Size Matters: Big Bugs on the Big Screen', in *Insect Poetics*, pp. 319-41.

Such an insect could not move. Also, because insects do not have a respiratory system with tubes connecting to internal lungs that have large absorptive areas, a giant like [the Beetle] would not be able to get enough oxygen to survive.<sup>176</sup>

Bozzone is aware accusations of scientific pedantry might be levelled at her. She disregards them. This thesis strives for Bozzone's and Haldane's entomological precision, however its analysis of Marsh's Beetle does not extend to negative commentary on the over-magnified dimensions of his insect. It aligns itself more closely with Warner's observation in *Fantastic Metamorphoses*. 'The breaking of rules of natural law and verisimilitude creates the fictional world with its own laws'.<sup>177</sup> What takes precedence is the degree of horror with which the Beetle is met because she occupies the anthropocentric space too largely. Had she merely been a regular-sized dung beetle the affect might have been farcical. In the firstspace of reality she is an unnatural and impossible insect. In the secondspace of the Gothic she is supernatural and super-sized, granted authorial licence to breathe, to move, to dominate her surroundings. In the thirdspace she resonates sympathetically with them.

An early disruption of the natural human insect size ratio famously occurs in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1866) with its girl-sized caterpillar. Further anomalies are present in: Ernest Van Bruyssel's *The Population of an Old Pear-Tree* (1870) where a sporadically miniaturised man observes bugs in the undergrowth; H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) with five-foot high insectile Selenites; and Lafcadio Hearn's 'The Dream of Akinosuke' (1904) with an ant-sized husband.<sup>178</sup> The plots of these texts unfold in strange dream-states or extra-terrestrial habitats where alternative norms prevail. Wells uses a long-distance broadcast from the scientist of *First Men in the Moon*, Cavor, interspersed with comments from its

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<sup>176</sup> Bozzone, 'What's Bugging Me'.

<sup>177</sup> Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p. 18.

<sup>178</sup> Hearn's portrayal of the marriage between man and ant may be literary defiance of Ohio's anti-miscegenation laws. See Butcher and Leaf, *Crawling Horror*, p. 139.



narrator, Bedford to rationalise enlarged insectoids. He counters any objections on the grounds of implausibility:

“the insect type of anatomy had, fortunately for men, never exceeded a relatively small size on earth.” The largest terrestrial insects, living or extinct, do not, as a matter of fact, measure more than 6 in. in length; “but here, against the lesser gravitation of the moon, a creature certainly as much an insect as a vertebrate seems to have been able to attain to human and ultrahuman dimensions”.<sup>179</sup>

My first three chapters drew on near-contemporary Egyptian Gothic tales to *The Beetle*. This chapter briefly considers *First Men* as a companion text to Marsh’s: close in date of composition, exhibiting some shared vocabulary, and containing aspects of entomological allegory. Opportunistic Bedford has a layman’s knowledge of bugs and describes a Selenite as a ‘thing’, ‘such a monster’, and ‘more grotesque and inhuman than the worst creations of a nightmare’.<sup>180</sup> His terminology is powerfully reminiscent of that applied by non-zoologists to the ‘thing’ that is the monstrous Beetle, the ‘writhing creation of some wild nightmare’.<sup>181</sup> However, Bedford does momentarily adopt an insectile perspective in his acknowledgement that to the moon dwellers the alien humans must constitute an invading Other. ‘But conceive how it would seem to decent Londoners, for example, to come upon a couple of living things, as big as men and absolutely unlike any other earthly animals’.<sup>182</sup> His is a mental role reversal foreshadowing a possible future annexation. The Selenites are strategic, maybe militaristically so. Their information-gathering from a captor resembles Dracula’s interrogations of Jonathan Harker in Transylvania, boosting encyclopaedic knowledge of a distant society in preparation for its takeover. The Selenites behave similarly to Wells’s other insectoids in *The Crystal Egg*, who, by means of superior engineering, watch Earth, perhaps waiting for an opportunity to

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<sup>179</sup> H. G. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*. (London: George Newnes, 1901), p. 290.

<sup>180</sup> Wells, *First Men*, pp. 137, 138, 150.

<sup>181</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 175.

<sup>182</sup> Wells, *First Men*, pp. 137-38.

strike against it. They also anticipate the Martians in *The War of the Worlds*, who, having first assessed mankind like animalcules viewed through a microscope, proceed to launch a successful attack. Marsh's Beetle does not operate in this manner. She is neither militaristic nor colonising. Her vengeance, and the way in which it unfolds, is characterised not so much by cold strategy as warm passion.

The impecunious playwright and would-be entrepreneur of *First Men* is not reduced to quite such dire straits as penniless, spineless Holt. Bedford maintains an almost invariable perception of an abyssal difference between human and insect, a view undermined by his author who hints at unrecognised similarities between the species. Wells accentuates Cavor's buzzing sound when absorbed in thought and uses the verb 'to crawl' as often as twenty-five times to express the mode of the men's progress through the lunar undergrowth or along the underground passages of the 'ant-hill'.<sup>183</sup> Most frequently, Wells adopts 'crept' or 'creeping' to describe the changing landscape of the moon, and sometimes to show how the men traverse their alien surroundings. What Wells never does is apply any variant of 'creep' or 'crawl' to the movements or physicality of the Selenites. They are not the creepy crawlies. They are the insectile erect. Darko Suvin notes: 'the various aliens in Wells represent a vigorous refashioning of the talking and symbolic animals of fairytale, bestiary and fable lore into Swiftian mirrors to man'.<sup>184</sup> The erectness of the Selenites and their capacity to learn alien language reinforces the distorted mirroring.

Living in a bee-like hexagonal cell, Cavor is intellectually curious about his alien hosts, identifying in their massed movements a 'leathery noise like the rustling of beetle wings, and a great bleating and cricket like-twittering of Selenite voices'.<sup>185</sup> In his imagination they are composite insectoids most strongly evoking ants, and in common with much Victorian thinking, he draws analogies between their civilisation

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<sup>183</sup> Wells, *First Men*, pp. 202, 282, 292.

<sup>184</sup> Darko Suvin, 'Introduction', in *H. G. Wells and Modern Science Fiction* eds. Darko Suvin and Robert M. Philmus (London: Associated UP, 1977), pp. 9-32 (p. 22).

<sup>185</sup> Wells, *First Men*, p. 197.

and industrialised society.<sup>186</sup> Some Selenites are subaltern, and for certain individuals he is aroused to feel a sympathy predicated on their anthropomorphisation into oppressed workers.

Phi-oo, [Cavor's Selenite translator] unless I misunderstood him, explained that in the earlier stages these queer little creatures are apt to display signs of suffering [...] but they easily become indurated to their lot; [...] That wretched-looking hand tentacle sticking out of its jar seemed to have a sort of limp appeal for lost possibilities; it haunts me still. [...]

One I remember very distinctly: he left a strong impression, I think, because some trick of the light and of his attitude was strongly suggestive of a drawn-up human figure [...] the pose of his slumber suggested a submissive suffering.<sup>187</sup>

Pity from Cavor travels downwards from a position of superiority towards a sympathy object occupying an unenviable position beneath the observing subject. When, on the other hand, Cavor is marooned and wholly controlled by the Grand Lunar and his minions, he is barely able to suppress horrified antipathy toward his hosts' unreadable physiognomies, societal structure, and perceived threat to his home territory. There is an inverse relationship between condescending sympathy and domineering monstrosity. In *Poetics of the Hive*, Hollingsworth reads Cavor's description of the Selenite leader as part 'Oriental despot' and part 'Milton's Satan', in no small degree because inscrutability and evil are tropes of insect imagery.<sup>188</sup> I note not once in the novel does Wells himself employ 'evil' or 'wicked' to describe the Selenites. The implication is moral censoriousness would be inappropriate since they are occupying their proper place on the moon and behaving in accordance with their nature therefore they cannot be held accountable to alien laws. The same is not true of the

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<sup>186</sup> Wells, *First Men*, p. 290.

<sup>187</sup> Wells, *First Men*, pp. 310, 312.

<sup>188</sup> Christopher Hollingsworth, *Poetics of the Hive: The Insect Metaphor in Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), p. 168.

Beetle, who, whether at home or abroad, powerful or cowering, human or scarab is never spared Caucasian condemnation.

Hollingsworth notes of Wells in *First Men* that instead of producing a 'traditional, human-centred allegory, he simultaneously experiments with an allegory derived from the science of entomology.'<sup>189</sup> Having attended T. H. Huxley's lectures on evolutionary biology, the writer was applying his specialist knowledge of eusocial insects to the service of Science Fiction. Contemporary reviewers questioned whether in contrast to his formic lunar inhabitants, the coleopteran character of Marsh could command 'the plausibility of Mr H. G. Wells'.<sup>190</sup> Certainly *The Beetle* may not be as entomologically erudite or blatantly allegorical of social hierarchies and colonialism as *First Men*, nevertheless, meanings capable of political and moral interpretation can be located in the insect imagery of Holt's metaphorical invertebrate state and in the extended commentary on subalternity, the othering of the colonised, the woman, and the foreigner expressed in the beetle body of the central character.

This chapter has shown thirdspace correspondence between supernatural scarab and real city in the visual affinity apparent in the thronged, aesthetically pleasing beetles of museums and material arts, and in the built environment, architecturally and commercially under Egypt's influence. It has demonstrated the figurative affinity afforded by the Beetle's ability to fly, which offers to her a panoptic vision of the metropolis and familiarity with the urban space beneath. Within the secondspace of the text, sympathy in the sense of likeness is unacknowledged by characters whose disgust and fear constructs exclusionary barriers albeit ineffective ones. Atherton ungraciously summarises their position: 'this is London, not a dog-hole in the desert'.<sup>191</sup> Into this spatial insult he loads all the differences of physical geography, culture, religion, and history which combine to transmogrify the Beetle

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<sup>189</sup> Hollingsworth, *Poetics of the Hive*, p. 162.

<sup>190</sup> Anon, 'Fiction', *Saturday Review* (6 November 1897), 500-501 (p. 500); Ranger Gull, 'Books and Writers', *Figaro* (20 November 1897), p. 9.

<sup>191</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 72.

into another species and push her beyond the outermost edge of the spheres of sympathy.

The environs of Dongola, said to contain ‘creatures of some monstrous growth’, are blown up at the end of the novel in what may be a psychic as well as cultural link with the Beetle.<sup>192</sup> Left in the debris are ‘more than a dozen replicas in bronze of the whilom sacred scarabaeus’, among whom the Beetle might be supposed to be more appropriately at home.<sup>193</sup> Whether the simultaneous destruction of the Beetle’s kin with her own supposed demise is genocide or spontaneous species extinction remains ambiguous. In England, monstrous insects such as they are not mourned in their morbidity.

The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis embraces the fact beetle-based critical analysis of this High Imperial period does not always take verbal form. A visual commentator on the violence of European colonial activities is the ‘insect-obsessed Flemish artist’, Jan Fabre, whose ‘Sacred Scarab’ was shown in Figure 0:11.<sup>194</sup> In a Royal commission taking over four months to complete and requiring twenty-nine assistants, Fabre was tasked with decorating the ceiling of the Hall of Mirrors in the nineteenth-century Royal Palace in Brussels, to which he affixed 1.6 million jewel-scarab elytra creating a permanent art installation entitled *Heaven of Delight*. In an interview in *The Guardian*, Fabre draws attention to its luminosity and its enduring quality, properties specifically borrowed from the coleopteran components.

It looks like a kind of greenish, bluish, violet, yellow golden sea of light that moves around constantly, creating drawings using the light [...] It will never go away, the colour will never fade and it will stay there for hundreds of years. I am quite satisfied.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 294.

<sup>193</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 294.

<sup>194</sup> The phrase is taken from Andrew Osborn, ‘Insect Obsessed Artist Covers Palace Ceiling’, *The Guardian* (11 November 2002), <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/11/arts.artsnews>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>195</sup> Quoted in ‘Insect Obsessed Artist’.

Intrinsically beautiful as the African beetle wing-cases are, their application is not motivated purely by aesthetics nor is their provenance coincidental. Fabre uses them explicitly to reference the activities of Victoria's uncle, King Leopold II of Belgium and his controversial colonial history in the Congo during the late-nineteenth century. Fabre's work is at once aesthetically pleasing and intellectually challenging. Concealed in its intricate design are rumoured to be severed hands and skulls as further expressions of disgust at the atrocities committed in the name of imperial expansionism.



Figure IV:19

Jan Fabre, *Totem*  
(2005)

Leuven, Belgium

More explicitly provocative than *Heaven of Delight* is Fabre's *Totem*, located in front of the University Library in Leuven. It depicts a giant, green beetle of the *Buprestidae* family stuck on a seventy-five-foot steel needle. The *Totem* insect shown in Figure IV:19 is underside uppermost, underlining its vulnerability. Apart from this flipping over, it resembles nothing so much as Atherton's plan for Marsh's Beetle: to overcome her, spike her and display her, transforming the living scarab into a lifeless thing. The size and prominence of Fabre's *Totem* beetle highlights the barbarity of its treatment in the way a smaller insect on a pin would not. European commoditisation and mutilation of the colonial subject is expressed as a giant sculpture. Magnified

insect impalement occupies the city space and speaks loudly and sympathetically for the subaltern. This thesis has been arguing for a parallel interpretation of the Beetle at the heart of Marsh's novel, aware that mitigating factors likely to trigger the emotion of sympathy may not be as easy to locate as a skewered, monstrous insect dominating the skyline.

## Chapter Five

### The Afterlives of the Beetle, and Adaptations of Sympathy

This final chapter examines the afterlives of *The Beetle* in terms of direct evolution and divergent evolution. Direct evolution is represented by cinematic and dramatic adaptations of the novel in the forms of a 1919 film, three separate theatrical productions of the 1920s, and a 1997 BBC Radio 4 drama. All retain the same name as Marsh's 1897 bestseller. Divergent evolution is manifested in texts, films and theatrical offerings not obviously related to *The Beetle*, but which participate in its insect imagery and reproduce many of its themes. The aim is to discover whether transmigration from print to alternative media or to alternative tales enhances or diminishes a sympathetic response to the Egyptian insect.

Fleeting references to *The Beetle* on screen and stage occur only occasionally in existing criticism of the novel and extended analysis such as mine is new.<sup>1</sup> I differentiate the six entities entitled *The Beetle* by author, director, or playwrights, and handle them in chronological order since each subsequent adaptation becomes new source material for the next. Indeed the 1929 play states it is 'adapted from Richard Marsh's novel and the [1925] play by George King and Charles Freeman'.<sup>2</sup> Linda Hutcheon establishes the point in *A Theory of Adaptation*: 'we experience adaptations as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition and variation'.<sup>3</sup> The original text and adaptations are subject to lateral, vertical, and diagonal influences, and exert them in turn. Previous chapters discussed natural history, entomology, Egyptology, archaeology, politics, contemporaneous

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<sup>1</sup> For brief mentions of *The Beetle* in relation to film rather than Marsh criticism see Jonathan Rigby, *English Gothic: A Century of Horror Cinema* (Reynolds & Hearn, 2004) and Rachael Low, *History of the British Film, 1918-1929* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Freeman, and George S. King, *The Beetle* (London, British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection, LCP 1925/21, Licence date: 29. May 1925), title page.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 8-9. All other references are to the 2013 second edition.



Gothic, art, jewellery, fashion and architecture in relation to *The Beetle*: all are influences impacting on the novel's adaptations.

Adaptation in a media context is an altered or amended version of original material. In its Darwinian sense the OED defines it as: 'a process of change or modification by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment or ecological niche, or a part of an organism to its biological function'.<sup>4</sup> Adaptation is explicitly linked to survival. Just as any living organism evolving in a way unsuited to its environment risks extinction, so a textual entity shifting between media forms risks the same fate if its progeny is weak.<sup>5</sup> The First World War brought about a seismic change to which Marsh responded by moving away from the Gothic genre and penning stories about a plucky clerk turned soldier. This cannot be taken as evidence he was averse to any adaptation of *The Beetle*.

Hutcheon defends adaptation against an overriding tendency to criticise the practice on the grounds of inferiority to the original text and/or lack of fidelity to it. Her contention is that far from compromising a novel, an adaptation may infuse it with new energy.

An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, stage, large-screen, television, and videogame reincarnations of *Dracula* infuse Stoker's 1897 monster with vitality, encouraging new generations to revisit the novel.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, adaptations of *The Beetle* squashed the parent insectile text nearly killing it. Despite this near fatal affect, decades afterwards the novel is rejuvenated on university curricula and at academic conferences while its adaptations barely manage

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<sup>4</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, "adaptation" <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>5</sup> I am nodding towards Literary Darwinism as outlined by Willis, *Literature and Science*, pp. 68-73.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 176.

<sup>7</sup> The first significant adaptation was F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) starring Max Schreck as Count Orlok. Bram Stoker's Estate held the copyright to *Dracula* and successfully sued Prana Film for copyright infringement causing the studio to go bankrupt.

to live out a precarious existence in footnotes or else are forgotten altogether. This chapter resuscitates them.

Theoreticians of media adaptation often subdivide the creative process into three categories according to faithfulness to what has gone before. Geoffrey Wagner in *The Novel and the Cinema* speaks of: transposition, 'in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference'; commentary, 'where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect'; and analogy, 'a fairly considerable departure'.<sup>8</sup> Dudley Andrew in *The Well-worn Muse* reverses the order to describe the activities of '[b]orrowing, intersection and fidelity of transformation'.<sup>9</sup> Michael Klein and Gillian Parker in *The English Novel and the Movies* roughly follow Wagner.<sup>10</sup> To varying degrees, the adaptations of *The Beetle* coincide most closely with the middle categories in that each is a 'commentary' on the novel or 'intersection' with it, yet none is an absolutely faithful rendition of it. As Klein and Parker express it, this is an approach that 'retains the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting or, in some cases, deconstructing the source text'.<sup>11</sup> I shall demonstrate how the adaptations of *The Beetle* reinterpret the narrative and deconstruct the source text, but also how they more problematically deconstruct the source insect in a bisection or even trisection of the Egyptian Beetle likely to fracture her already fragile sympathetic affect.

Emotional reaction is influenced by the mode of engagement. Adaptations migrate narrative and characters from an imaginative and conceptual medium experienced silently, individually and episodically, to a perceptive medium

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<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Rutherford NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1975), pp. 222, 224, 226.

<sup>9</sup> Darryl Andrew 'The Well-worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory', in *Narrative Strategies*, ed. by Syndy Conger and Janice R. Welch (Macomb III: West Illinois UP, 1980), pp. 8-14 (p. 10).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Klein and Gillian Parker, eds, *The English Novel and the Movies* (New York, Frederick Unger Publishing, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Klein and Parker, pp. 9-10.

experienced simultaneously with others and all at one sitting.<sup>12</sup> Robert Stam positions literature as the 'senior art form', elevated by logophilia, whereas dramatised forms incorporating the cinematic and theatrical tend to be lowered by iconophobia or 'a suspicion of the visual'.<sup>13</sup> Their scenography, including decoration, staging, costume, lighting and even the interior architecture of the cinema or playhouse in which they are shown or performed, directs audience interpretation of script and personae. Should ocular aspects be ineffectually delivered, emotional engagement could be irredeemably hampered. Speaking of theatrical adaptations in *Subsequent Performances*, Jonathan Miller comments: 'most novels are irreversibly damaged by being dramatised as they were written without any sort of performance in mind at all.'<sup>14</sup> For Stam and Miller, as opposed to Hutcheon, transcoding thoughts and descriptions into the visual field of scenography encompassing actorly movements or contrivances is more likely than not to be unsuccessful. To those cinema or theatre directors operating in the early twentieth century, *The Beetle*, with its foregrounding of a non-bipedal monster, presented additional challenges.

This chapter interrogates the direct descendants of Marsh's entomological novel called *The Beetle*, and then moves on to study examples of divergent evolution in terms of cultural borrowing or diagonal relationship to the source text. The most well-known is Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Others include the New York cockroach columnist of Don Marquis, the politicised insects of the Čapek brothers, the filmic bugs of Jan Švankmajer, and an entire khepri race created by China Miéville. I have chosen each of them for the way they emphasise aspects of Marsh's novel while at the same time expanding the insect perspective and more blatantly inviting sympathetic identification. Even if the influence of *The Beetle* on them is indirect or

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<sup>12</sup> Hutcheon, 2013, p. 133. Hutcheon acknowledges the influence of Richard Gerring, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in *Film Adaptation*, ed. by James Naremore (Athlone: Athlone Press, 2000), pp. 54-76 (p. 58).

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Miller *Subsequent Performances* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 66.

unattributable, I consider them, along with the direct adaptations, to constitute its various afterlives.

### ***The Beetle on Screen***

It is likely proposals to adapt Marsh's bestselling novel were not infrequently put before him, as indicated by Robert Aickman's papers at the British Library. One example dated 'This week' from a Miss Deidre Lawrence of the Elephant and Castle Theatre, offers to bring out the 'great dramatic possibilities' of *The Beetle* 'with slight alterations that are needed for such', and advertise it 'on all bills, programmes, etc. etc.'<sup>15</sup> There is no record of Marsh's response. In 1900 G. Müller Mann of Leipzig published *The Beetle* in German as *Der Skarabäus*, and in 1907 R. Frensch of the same publishing firm was writing to Marsh advising him of the opinion of the Stage Manager at the Leipzig theatre: 'it would almost certainly prove successful as a play'.<sup>16</sup> The Manager proposes putting on 'a dramatised version of the work on the boards', of which Marsh would enjoy a substantial share of the profits and is assured of being at 'no risk of pecuniary loss whatsoever' [original underlining].<sup>17</sup>

There are no further letters on the Leipzig dramatisation project in the archive, however in August 1913, Frensch excitedly announces a lady of his acquaintance, who already has ideas for a stage version of *The Beetle*, hopes to interest one of the 'film-editeurs' in producing a '*Kino-werk* (Film-Drama)' of the novel for which the author and editor would receive a fee.<sup>18</sup> A few weeks later Frensch reveals the prospective investor to be Mrs Marie Brucks-Wallersee, and encloses an agreement under which

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<sup>15</sup> Deidre Lawrence to Richard Marsh, letter dated: 'This week' (London: British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection Unbound, Add MS 89209/6/18).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Marsh, *Der Skarabäus (The Beetle)*, trans. by R. O. Mahlo (Leipzig: Verlag G. Müller Mann, 1900); R. Frensch of G. Müller Mann to Richard Marsh, letter dated 04 January 1907 (London: British Library Western Manuscripts Collection Unbound, Add MS 89209/6/18).

<sup>17</sup> Frensch to Marsh, 04 January 1907.

<sup>18</sup> R. Frensch to Richard Marsh, letter dated 09 August 1913 (London: British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection Unbound, Add MS 89209/6/18).

Richard Marsh would receive ‘half of all her obtained revenues’ with a penalty of 2,000 Mark plus all raised expenses falling due if either party were to withdraw after signing.<sup>19</sup> Countess Marie von Wallersee’s signature is on the agreement and stamped, although there is nothing to indicate whether Marsh signed and returned his own copy or if the agreement had been forwarded speculatively by Frensch. It seems unlikely a legally binding document would have been drawn up without authorial encouragement, so it raises the tantalising prospect there may exist a hitherto undiscovered German film of *The Beetle* under the title stated in the agreement letter, ‘“Der Scarabäus” Ein Mysterium von Richard Marsh (The Scarab: A Mystery by Richard Marsh)’ [original underlining].<sup>20</sup> It would have preceded the English film by around six years unless the First World War prevented it being made.

The British film of *The Beetle* was a post-war production of 1919 directed by Alexander Butler, who had already adapted Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan* for the screen in 1917.<sup>21</sup> *The Beetle* was written by the actress, Helen Blizzard, also credited with being assistant editor and assistant director, and who the previous year had adapted *The Key of the World* for Gaumont British Picture Corporation.<sup>22</sup> Blizzard was not untypical of the early twentieth century in being a female thespian turned scriptwriter, and she brought the influence of her sex to the portrayal of strong women in the roles of the Priestess and Dora Grayling, but seemingly not to the

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<sup>19</sup> R. Frensch to Richard Marsh, letter dated 30 September 1913 (London: British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection Unbound, Add MS 89209/6/18).

<sup>20</sup> This spelling uses the letter ‘c’ and not the letter ‘k’ in scarab as in the translated book. Both specifically name the insect as the scarab and not *Der Käfer*, the more generic German word for beetle.

<sup>21</sup> *The Beetle*, dir. Alexander Butler (Charles Urban Trading Company, 1919); *The Sorrows of Satan*, dir. by Alexander Butler (G. B. Samuelson Productions, 1917); Simon Brown, ‘The British Silent Horror Film and the First World War’, *Off Screen*, 14.10 (2010), <[https://offscreen.com/view/british\\_silent\\_horror](https://offscreen.com/view/british_silent_horror)> [accessed 08 July 2021]. The 1926 remake was more faithful to Corelli’s novel, *The Sorrows of Satan*, dir. D. W. Griffith (Paramount Pictures, 1926).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Helen Blizzard (1872-1956)’, *IMDb* [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0088583/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_srsg\\_0](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0088583/?ref_=nv_sr_srsg_0) [accessed 08 July 2021].

Beetle.<sup>23</sup> *The Beetle* was produced by Barker Motion Photography Limited, a company set up by William Barker, the man responsible for establishing Ealing Studios, which its own website proudly proclaims is still the largest film studio in Britain and ‘the oldest continuously working studio facility for film production in the world.’<sup>24</sup> What is clear from the involvement of Barker, Blizzard and Butler is the cinematic ‘family’ of *The Beetle* film had an impressive pedigree.

The film was released in the era of the silent movie, although ‘silent movie’ is something of a misnomer since noises made by instruments, projection machinery, and viewers formed an intrinsic part of the experience. A musical accompaniment played fortissimo and staccato stimulated shock and anxiety, while a softer legato touch reinforced impressions of romance and beauty. The gasp or sigh or titter of neighbours could cause others within earshot to do the same. Kevin Brownlow’s detailed analysis of silent movies as an art form emphasises the collaborative role played by the audience, members of which were not passive receivers of images in a soundless room, but active and imaginative participants at an event.

The secret of silent film lay in its unique ability to conjure up a situation that closely involved the audience, because demands were made on its imagination. The audience responded to suggestion, supplied the missing sounds and voices, and became a creative contributor to the process of projection. A high degree of technical skill was required to make such demands effective: what the audience saw it had to believe in.<sup>25</sup>

His comment on imagination’s role in facilitating immersion ends with a caveat. A failure of *The Beetle* to make the audience ‘believe in’ the insect might render it ridiculous instead of noxious. Intertitles compensated for the absence of on-screen

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<sup>23</sup> Lizzie Francke, *Script Girls: Women Writers in Hollywood* (London: BFI Publishing, 1994); ‘Helen Blizzard’, *Women and the Silent British Cinema* <<https://womenandsilentbritishcinema.wordpress.com/the-women/helen-blizzard/>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>24</sup> Ealing Studios, ‘History’ <<https://ealingstudios.com/about-ealing/history-3/>> [accessed 30 July 2021].

<sup>25</sup> Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade’s Gone By* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 3.

human voices, but these dialogic and explanatory interventions were kept to a minimum so as not to interrupt the plot's momentum. The visual 'language' of silent film was speaking through mime, costume, and body positioning, all of which could be enhanced by camera angles, widescreen shots or close-ups, special effects and editing trickery. Were the camera never to film from the point of view of the Beetle the audience would never see as the Beetle. It is the cinematic equivalent of lack of narratorial voice in a novel.

*The Beetle* was released the same year as the film of *The First Men in the Moon*, for which H. G. Wells co-wrote the screenplay and consulted on set and costume design.<sup>26</sup> Some stills of it remain, but neither the British Film Industry archive nor any other repository holds a full copy. The base ingredient of movie reels in the silent era was highly flammable. Nitrate-based film stock also contained valuable raw materials. Losses of films might therefore result from accidental destruction by fire or deliberate pulping to extract silver. Whether this latter procedure can be taken as a comment on perceived artistic worth is impossible to say, but only around one third of silent films survive and *The Beetle* is not among them. To compensate for its loss, I draw on footage or stills from contemporaneous movies on related subjects, and garner specific information about the film of *The Beetle* from its advertising brochure and a handful of reviews.

Georges Méliès, French magician turned film maker, had shown his first film in London a year or so before Marsh's novel became a bestseller and was a prolific producer and director, often incorporating plotlines touching on Egyptian Gothic.<sup>27</sup> Of Méliès's films, *Cleopatra's Tomb* (1900) includes a death-defying Cleopatra stepping out from the flames consuming her burning and dismembered mummy; *The Monster* (1903) portrays a metamorphic resurrection; and *The Vengeance of Egypt* (1912)

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<sup>26</sup> *The First Men in the Moon*, dir. by Bruce Gordon and J. L. V. Leigh (Gaumont British Picture Corporation, 1919). Like *The Beetle*, it was a 5-reel film.

<sup>27</sup> David Shipman, *The Story of Cinema* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), p. 19; David Huckvale, *Ancient Egypt in the Popular Imagination: Building a Fantasy in Film, Literature, Music and Art* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

concerns a stolen scarab ring fatal to wrongful possessors.<sup>28</sup> Méliès was merging cinematic trickery with the Egyptian occult and his techniques enhanced a plethora of films set in Ancient Egypt including three called *The Mummy* released in 1911, 1912 and 1914 respectively.<sup>29</sup>

*The Beetle* with its theme of an avenging entity would have been tapping into Méliès's successes and that of Charles Calvert's *The Avenging Hand*, aka *The Wraith of the Tomb* (1915), loosely based on Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*.<sup>30</sup> Ancient Egyptian mysticism spiced with romance and revenge was a blend well received by cinema audiences as Basil Glynn charts in *The Mummy on Screen*.<sup>31</sup> Antonia Lant observes in 'How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania' that 'Egypt played midwife to film's birth' as subject matter and corollary to trick film, its fantastical tropes giving 'form to cinema's power to rearrange time and space, as well as providing resonances with death.'<sup>32</sup> Magical illusions could be created by editing processes of dissolves, in which two or more shots are gradually overlapped, or substitution splicing technique, when filming is paused so a selected element can be substituted for what has gone before.<sup>33</sup> They were devices ideally suited to the Gothic genre, and plundering bestselling popular fiction augured well for box office receipts. Brian McFarlane comments on this phenomenon in *Novel to Film*: 'No doubt there [was] the lure of a pre-sold title, the expectation that respectability or popularity achieved in one

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<sup>28</sup> *Cleopatra's Tomb* (*Cléopâtre* [1899]), dir. by Georges Méliès (Charles Urban Trading Company 1900); *The Monster*, dir. by Georges Méliès (Star-Film, 1903); *The Vengeance of Egypt*, dir. by Georges Méliès (Gaumont Company, 1912); Georges Méliès *Complete Catalogue of Genuine and Original 'Star' Films* (New York and Paris, 1903).

<sup>29</sup> Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> *The Avenging Hand* (aka *The Wraith of the Tomb*, dir. by Charles Calvert (1915); Review in *Bioscope*, 7 October 1915, p. 105.

<sup>31</sup> Basil Glynn, *The Mummy on Screen: Orientalism and Monstrosity in Horror Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

<sup>32</sup> Antonia Lant, 'The Curse of the Pharaoh, or How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania', *October*, 59 (1992), 86-112 (pp. 101-03).

<sup>33</sup> Frank Kessler, 'Trick Films', in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* ed. Richard Abel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 641-53 (p. 644).



medium might infect the work created in another'.<sup>34</sup> Special effects could bring marvellous transformations to life, and *The Beetle* with its own spectacular metamorphosis ought to have been poised for success.

In America, Fox Film Studios brought out a blockbuster version of *Cleopatra* (1917) based on Rider Haggard's novel. It was a lavish production over two hours long with gorgeous costumes, some of which were titillatingly risqué, and with action unfolding against elaborate backdrops and sets, supported by more than two thousand backstage staff.<sup>35</sup> The UK film industry operated to lower budgets, and, according to Keith Withall's *Early and Silent Cinema*, did not display either high production values or sophisticated camera techniques to rival those of the US.<sup>36</sup> When *The Beetle* was brought out in 1919, it might as a consequence have seemed somewhat old-fashioned, which is why 'early' or 'primitive' film is relevant to its analysis.

At five reels long *The Beetle* ran for approximately one-and-a-quarter hours and was a more modest affair than its transatlantic counterparts, yet if its director had wished to show the transmigration from Priestess of Isis to insect, there was little preventing him using cinematic sleights of hand applied by UK film pioneer, former stage hypnotist, and magic lantern lecturer, George Albert Smith.<sup>37</sup> Smith patented the process of double exposure, developed the dissolve effect, and deployed them in short movies such as *The X-Ray Fiend* (1897) and *Photographing a Ghost* (1898).<sup>38</sup> He collaborated with Méliès on a couple of ventures including *The Haunted Castle* (1897), and it was evident there were longstanding exchanges of ideas across the English

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<sup>34</sup> Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), p. 7. McFarlane takes as a case study the silent film adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*.

<sup>35</sup> *Cleopatra*, dir. by J. Gordon Edwards (Fox Film Studios, 1917).

<sup>36</sup> Keith Withall, *Early and Silent Cinema* (Leighton Buzzard, Beds: Auteur Publishing, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> The Society for Psychical Research employed Smith along with his double-act partner Douglas Blackburn in its first experiments to demonstrate telepathy.

<sup>38</sup> Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer, 'G.A. Smith and the Rise of the Edited Film in England', in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. by Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 73-89.

Channel. If Barker and Butler did not make the most of established technical knowledge in creating the film of *The Beetle*, they were quite literally missing a trick.<sup>39</sup>

A constraint of cinematic and dramatic media is the obligation to make their offerings comprehensible within an acceptable running time. A degree of compression is therefore usually required when adapting a novel for screen or stage. This temporal constraint and resultant editing-out of scenes, conversations and characters, risks sacrificing nuances present in the original text. When coupled with the need to navigate the censor for content, the problem is exacerbated. The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) was set up in 1912, and, although it did not publish a code of practice, there were several subjects that caused moral and ethical concern including 'nudity', 'drug habits', 'outrages on women', 'cruelty to animals', and 'gruesome murders'.<sup>40</sup> All are present in the novel of *The Beetle*. The film adaptation had to be made with BBFC compliance in mind since the investment of time and money could only be recouped through public screenings. It needed to be uncontroversial enough to be shown: a requirement that may have made it less thrilling.

Egyptianised Gothic was popular. So too were insects through the short films of F. Percy Smith, the British photographer and pioneer of natural history filmmaking who used microphotography to bring the antics of enlarged insects to the cinema. Smith is a common surname, and he does not appear to have been related to George Smith, but like him, he had a working relationship with Charles Urban, the motion picture pioneer.<sup>41</sup> Percy Smith's *The Acrobatic Fly*, aka *The Balancing Bluebottle* (1910), and *The Strength and Agility of Insects* (1911), were celebrations of the natural insect, and Percy Smith was at pains to explain that neither cruelty nor trickery were involved. According to Jenny Hammerton of the BFI: 'his intention in making the

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<sup>39</sup> Although trick film was most prevalent before 1908, elements of its style continued to be used in science fiction, fantasy, and horror films.

<sup>40</sup> See Withall, pp. 144-45.

<sup>41</sup> F. Percy Smith <<https://www.charlesurban.com/biographies.html>> [accessed 08 July 2021]

film[s] was of course to entertain the public, but also to demonstrate the strength and agility of those insects we might unthinkingly squash or swat when they settle on our lunch'.<sup>42</sup> These films were effectively the insect circus transposed onto the big screen and they transformed Dungo's relatives into movie stars. The cinema viewing public's familiarity with real insects may have undermined the artificial scarab in *The Beetle*.

The 1919 advertising brochure for *The Beetle* shown in Figure V:1 pronounces itself to be: 'A thrilling and fascinating drama from the famous novel of RICHARD MARSH'; 'A remarkably fine Screen adaptation of RICHARD MARSH'S well-known Novel'.<sup>43</sup> Its inner spread indicates its cast of characters includes Paul Lessingham, Sidney Atherton, Richard Holt [sic], The Priestess of Isis, Necos the High Priest, Dora Greyling [sic] and Marjorie Lindon, but no supernatural scarab.<sup>44</sup> The insect is kept distinct from the human, and male and female aspects are separated. These stratagems bypass awkward issues of hybridity and gender performativity but serve to diminish the formerly complex Beetle. In Marsh's novel there is a single being in whom coexist multiple elements. In the silent movie resides the rather more simplistic triad of High Priest, Priestess and Scarab.

The Beetle is given prominence verbally in the brochure, but visually almost not at all. The film's title dominates the front cover in giant red letters. Richard Marsh's name is capitalised and in bold. A photograph of Lessingham and Lindon in evening dress occupies slightly more than the upper-left quadrant, however there is minimal visualisation of any insect. A comparatively insignificant, stylised white scarab is present in the upper-right quadrant, but it is semi-camouflaged by surrounding decorative swirls of the same colour. An entire inner page is devoted to four movie stills, but none includes the bug. A temple scene shows a dark-haired woman in a

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<sup>42</sup> Jenny Hammerton, 'Strength and Agility of Insects', *BFI*  
<<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/594334/index.html>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>43</sup> *The Beetle* film brochure is semi-glossy A3 paper in greyscale with red detail folded to make 4 x A4 portrait-oriented faces (British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection Unbound, Add MS 89209/6/21).

<sup>44</sup> *Beetle* brochure, p. 2.

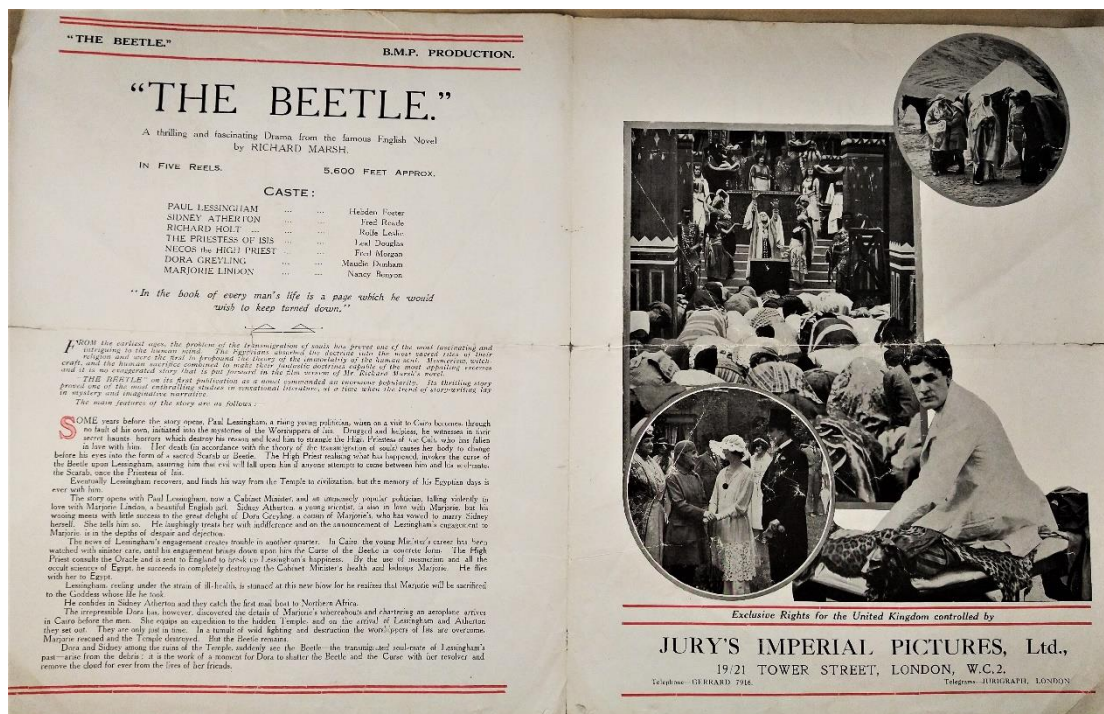
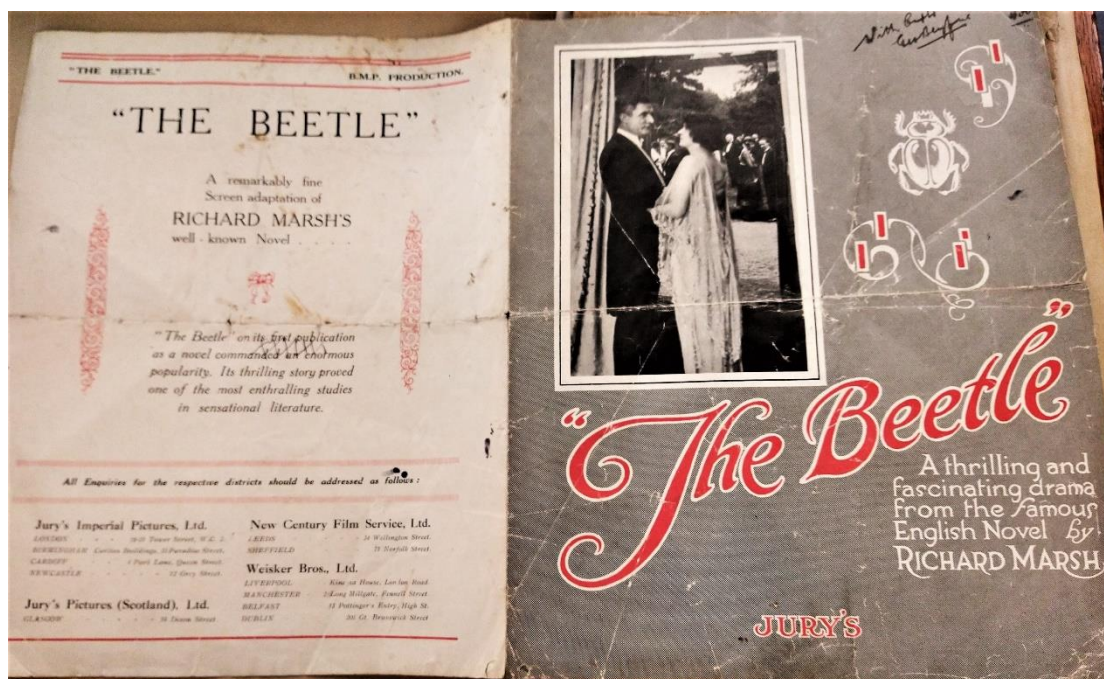


Figure V:1

*The Beetle* film brochure, outer and inner spread (1919)

Photograph by Janette Leaf

white dress with metallic breast plates brandishing a knife at another woman as a Priest casts his arms skyward. An outdoor scene, not immediately recognisable as Egypt, features a horse rather than camels. The third still shows two women at a garden party smiling and clasping hands: the lacy dress of one and mannish tweeds of the other acting as sartorial indicators of Marjorie's vulnerability and Dora's go-getting attitude. The fourth still of a disgruntled man seated on a couch and looking over his shoulder to camera is presumably Lessingham. Among the images is no beetle whatsoever: neither the shadow of one, nor a statue of one, nor even the inclusion of one in a headdress. As an insect, The Priestess of Isis, whom the promotional puff describes as the 'transmigrated soul-mate of Lessingham's past' and the embodiment of a curse in coleopterous 'concrete form', is photographically absent.<sup>45</sup>

Georges Méliès's *The Brahmin and the Butterfly* (1901) precedes *The Beetle* film by some years.<sup>46</sup> It too is a metamorphosis story. The plot of the short film centres on a magician who charms a large caterpillar and places it in a giant cocoon out of which a full-sized, beautiful, butterfly-winged woman emerges complete with antennae. He transforms the insect into an Oriental princess, but she in turn transforms him into a caterpillar. It is left open whether, crawling after her, he ever reaches the state of imago. Leskosky considers this the first big-bug film, and he identifies in it the trope of 'a confusion or conflation of the human and insect'.<sup>47</sup>

A second film on a similar theme of an insectile female gaining mastery over her controlling male creator is Segundo de Chomón's short, hand-coloured, *The Golden Beetle* (1907).<sup>48</sup> It depicts the transformation of a beetle, about the size of a human baby, which crawls up a sorcerer's wall, is momentarily cradled by him, and is

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<sup>45</sup> *Beetle* brochure, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *The Brahmin and the Butterfly*, dir. by Georges Méliès (Star Film, 1901), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDGaZ3wFEaU>> [accessed 30 July 2021].

<sup>47</sup> Richard J Leskosky, 'Size Matters' in *Insect Poetics*, p. 325.

<sup>48</sup> *The Golden Beetle* (Le scarabée d'or), dir. Segundo de Chomón (Pathé Frères, 1907), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5qeU6fiy-k> IMDb online> [accessed 30 July 2021]. See also IMDb <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0171720/>> [accessed 30 July 2021]. Care should be taken not to confuse it with the identically titled adaptation of Poe's *The Gold Bug* (1914).

then tossed into a ceremonial cauldron. With a flurry of pyrotechnics, the iridescent, six-winged woman shown in Figure V:2 materialises. Her coleopteran origins and hybrid retention of insect characteristics do not prohibit her being aesthetically pleasing, and her youthful attractiveness in comparison to the magician's hunched, aged figure render her by far the more sympathetic being. Méliès and Chomón present insect becoming woman and exerting vengeful power. It is an interesting reversal of Marsh's conceit of woman becoming scarab.



Figure V:2

*The Golden Beetle (Le scarabée d'or)*,  
dir. by Segundo de Chomón (1907)  
French Film Poster, Courtesy IMDb

A third example of early-twentieth-century human animal metamorphosis is Henry MacRae's *The Werewolf* (1913), in which a Native American woman turns lupine to punish aggressive, white settlers who have transgressed against her Navajo tribe.<sup>49</sup> There is no Brahmin or magician forcing the transformation. The shapeshifting woman has sole agency. Her avenging agenda and voluntary swapping of species place the film thematically alongside *The Beetle*. Where they diverge is the ease or difficulty with which a viewer might detect justness in the cause of the central character. The exercise of moral judgement is likely to find the Navajo woman and her

<sup>49</sup> *The Werewolf*, dir. by Henry MacRae (Bison Motion Pictures, 1913). See IMDb online <[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0003526/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_3](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0003526/?ref_=fn_al_tt_3)> [accessed 08 July 2021].

avatar more sympathetic than Marsh's *Woman of the Songs* even though their motivations are not so dissimilar.

To turn a person into a wolfish quadruped was comparatively straightforward, even more than a century ago. Greater ingenuity was required to make an insect. One who did manage to film credible insect performances was the internationally acclaimed stop motion animator, Ladislav Starevich. By the time *The Beetle* film was being made, Starevich had already released several movies starring insects. Many privilege beetles.<sup>50</sup> Having found it too difficult to work with uncooperative live subjects who defensively played dead under his over-bright studio lighting, he opted to work with actual dead insects enhanced with wax, rubber, and microscopic pivots which he then painstakingly positioned in a filmed sequence of poses to imitate life.<sup>51</sup>

Starevich's *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912) has an exclusively insect cast apart from a cameo appearance by a miniscule frog mercifully exhibiting no inclination for entomophagy.<sup>52</sup> Insects are anthropomorphised to such an extent that Mr Beetle walks on hind legs, carries a briefcase, and lives in a furnished house as shown in Figure V:3. The plot, like that of *The Beetle*, is driven by jealousy. When Mr Beetle tires of his coleopterous spouse, he visits a club, becomes smitten by an alluring dragonfly with whom he has a sexual liaison, all of which is covertly captured on camera by her ex-paramour grasshopper. Meanwhile Mrs Beetle sits for a portrait painting by an amorous cockroach with whom she too engages in interspecies copulation. Caught *in flagrante* the indestructible cockroach escapes up the chimney. Mr Beetle smashes the portrait over his wife's head, hypocritically concealing his own guilt, and then takes her to the cinema to demonstrate forgiveness. Unbeknownst to him, the projectionist is the grasshopper, who shows his own film instead of the

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<sup>50</sup> Examples of his insect films include *The Ant and the Grasshopper* (1911); *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912); *The Beautiful Leukanida* (1912); *Insects' Aviation Week* (1912); *The Insects' Christmas* (1913). All titles are translated from their original Polish or Russian.

<sup>51</sup> Arkadijs Neminuscijs, 'Vladislav Starevich and his Trained Beetles', *Nature and Culture: Comparative Studies*, 4.1 (Daugavpils: Daugavpils University Academic Press, 2012), 77-80 (p. 78).

<sup>52</sup> *The Cameraman's Revenge*, dir. by Ladislav Starevich (Moscow: Khanzhonkov Company, 1912), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkFW8kXK1lw>> [accessed 30 July 2021].



advertised feature, and he exposes the adulterer. Mirroring the earlier scene with the portrait, Mrs Beetle bashes her husband with an umbrella, and he crashes head-first through the on-screen cinema screen.



Figure V:3

Film Still:

*The Cameraman's Revenge*

dir. by Ladislav Starevich

(Moscow: Khanzhonkov

Company (1912)

No insect apart from the dragonfly utilises their innate ability to fly.<sup>53</sup> Events unfold down in the undergrowth, reinforced by outdoor shots being framed with leaves. Passion and revenge are played for laughs as the insects perform as miniature pseudo humans. The pedestrianised grounding of the entomological puppets fosters in the audience an ironic identification with them rather than alienation from them. It is an invitation to relate to human foibles and not to experience the lives of actual insects. The film's charm lies in remarkable technical skill and in its humorous, almost farcical illumination of the human condition.

Starevich's works indicate how insects can be portrayed cinematically without the requirement for twenty-first century computer graphics or ultra-sophisticated special effects. *The Cameraman's Revenge* demonstrates the technical know-how of using real insects in screen productions existed seven years before *The Beetle*.<sup>54</sup> Had

<sup>53</sup> The director is zoologically accurate since Coleoptera (beetles), Blattodea (cockroaches), and Orthoptera (grasshoppers) spend more time on the ground, whereas Odonata (dragonflies), whose six small legs are invariably too weak to support the weightier body, usually fly.

<sup>54</sup> Silent films crossed national and language barriers since all that was required was substitution of translated title cards. WW1 (1914-1918) and the Russian Revolution (1917-1923) may have hampered international spread.



Butler and Barker possessed the imagination, they could have combined clever tricks of perspective to include a real beetle rising from a miniature reproduction of an Egyptian Temple, either alive and trained like the insects of Percy Smith, or dead and posed like those of Starevich. A less ambitious and more obvious option would have been the use of cleverly designed costume, a tactic adopted by Méliès for his insectoid Selenites in *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and by Gordon and Leigh for *The First Men in the Moon* (1919) mentioned earlier in this chapter.<sup>55</sup> Figure V:4 shows stills from both films.



Figure V:4

Selenites:

Top:

*A Trip to the Moon*

dir. by Georges Méliès  
(1902)

Bottom:

*The First Men in the Moon*

dir. by Bruce Gordon and  
J. L. V. Leigh (1919)

<sup>55</sup> *A Trip to the Moon*, dir. by Georges Méliès (Star Film, 1902). Méliès's film survives in full <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNAHcMMOHE8>> [accessed 30 July 2021].

Whatever the solution was in *The Beetle*, reviews indicate the clumsy representation of the scarab missed the mark. The problem did not reside with the actress playing in Rigby's words 'the polymorphous title role' of the High Priestess.<sup>56</sup> *Shields News* was mesmerised by her Gothic appeal. 'There are few vampires in the English screen world, and perhaps of these Miss Leal Douglas is the most beautiful.'<sup>57</sup> As cinematic adaptors of *Dracula* would be quick to recognise, in contrast to those working with *The Beetle*, vampires possess an aesthetic appeal easier to locate than any found in bugs. In November 1919, *The Bioscope*, a trade magazine of the silent cinema, was charitable in making allowances for the challenges of adapting the novel for the screen: 'you inevitably risk losing some of the eerie hair raising qualities which the author was able to create by a clever manipulation of literary effect'.<sup>58</sup> A century later, Judith Halberstam agrees this failing is almost inevitable with any horror adaptation. 'One might expect to find that cinema multiplies the possibilities for monstrosity, but in fact, the visual register quickly reaches a limit of visibility [...] in the horror film, the monster must always fail to be monstrous enough.'<sup>59</sup>

The crossing of genre boundaries from popular novel to screen entails a shift from 'the concept of the mental image' to 'the percept of the visual image', as George Bluestone, a pioneer of literature adaptation expresses it in *Novels into Film*.<sup>60</sup> Brian MacFarlane picks up the idea in his almost identically entitled *Novel to Film*, warning that adaptation carries the risk that verbal conceits 'bodied forth in perceptual concreteness' may be inadequate if 'much of the original's popularity is intransigently tied to its verbal mode.'<sup>61</sup> It appears to have been an issue for *The Beetle*. The review

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<sup>56</sup> Rigby, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> 'An English Vampire', *Shields Daily News* (20 August 1920), p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Beetle', in *The Bioscope* (Thursday 20 November 1919). The Skandanowsky brothers invented a film system known as 'Bioskop' for which they gave a public screening in Berlin in November 1895, a month before the Lumière brothers screened their Cinématographie in Paris. The magazine's title derives from this alternative name for film.

<sup>59</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Berkeley: CA: University of California Press, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Brian MacFarlane, *Novel to Film* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

of *Variety Magazine* scoffs at a number of failings in the film, and it contains a particularly scathing criticism of the supersized scarab.

Although much advertised and adapted from the sensational novel by Richard Marsh. "The Beetle" with all its occultism, black magic and mysticism, fails to be anything more than a production of the most mediocre type.

The very things that grip in the novel fail to get anything but laughs when on the screen. For instance, the High Priestess, reincarnated in the form of a loathsome beetle, is represented by a pantomime "prop" which does anything but inspire the horror hoped for, but it will inspire more merriment than most screen comedies.<sup>62</sup>

The gripping horror of the novel is lost in the presence of laughter. Also lost in the reduction of the sacred scarab to a mere 'thing', is an opportunity for any appreciation of subtlety in the insect entity. The cinema audience is presented with an inanimate object: an inadequate vehicle for conveying the desperation of the beautiful woman's transformation into a 'noxious insect', and wholly unfit for communicating salvation in being reborn as a (to her) divine creature. In the pantomime 'prop', the possibility of sympathy of any kind is gone.

Murray Smith's consideration of emotion in the cinema concludes there are degrees of spectatorial engagement which are: from least to most intense, recognition, alignment, and allegiance.<sup>63</sup> Recognition is referential to a real-world setting. Alignment adopts the same viewing position as a character and facilitates shared experiences and emotions. Allegiance is a positive moral evaluation of a character leading to affective arousal of sympathy. The latter two are clearly absent for the scarab in *The Beetle* film, and, because of her supernaturalism, even the first is ruled out. The sympathetic insect is not located in the large screen adaptation.

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<sup>62</sup> 'Moving Pictures', in *Variety Magazine*, January 1920, p. 75.

<sup>63</sup> Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 4-5.

### ***The Beetle on Stage***

Brian McFarlane rejoices that novels and films, and by implication also recordings of radio dramas, continue to exist as documents or texts amenable to sustained scrutiny in the way stage performances are not.<sup>64</sup> John Bryant suggests even the text itself is fluid: 'no text is a fixed thing: there are always a variety of manuscript versions, revisions, and different print editions'.<sup>65</sup> Textual fluidity is more obviously true of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* with its two endings than the novel of *The Beetle*, although Marsh's manuscript does show small refinements as part of his writing process. Speaking of dramas, Hutcheon notes: 'no two productions on one printed play text or musical score, or even two performances of the same production, will be alike'.<sup>66</sup> Given the human element, her observation is indisputable, but the script, which includes instructions for staging and lighting, continues to exist as a permanent record. Between 1824 and 1968 there was a legal requirement for all plays to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for approval prior to public performance.<sup>67</sup> As a consequence, every theatre script from the period along with strikings out and notes has been preserved. From this unique source held at the British Library it has been possible to ascertain that three independent dramatic adaptations of *The Beetle* were granted a licence in 1925, 1928 and 1929 respectively. Newspaper reviews verify each was performed.

Wilkie Collins had creative involvement in theatrical versions of his own sensation fiction and Bram Stoker hastily presented *Dracula: Or The Un-Dead* in play form at The Lyceum Theatre on 18 May 1897, just days prior to the publication of

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<sup>64</sup> McFarlane, p. 202.

<sup>65</sup> John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Hutcheon (2013), p. 170.

<sup>67</sup> This stipulation arose out of the Stage Licensing Act of 1737 and the Theatres Act of 1843.

*Dracula* the book.<sup>68</sup> The performance, intended to protect the author's dramatic rights, was governed by a hybrid script in Stoker's handwriting interspersed with passages – some very long – extracted from his novel and pasted in.<sup>69</sup> The Count himself is only on stage in the nine-scene Prologue set in Transylvania. His final appearance lying in the castle vault takes the form of glowing eyes as Harker attempts in vain to kill him with a shovel.<sup>70</sup> Ellen Terry's daughter, Edith Craig took the role of Mina. Henry Irving, reputedly part inspiration for *Dracula*, did not participate.<sup>71</sup> Richard Marsh wrote no fewer than fourteen dramatic pieces, but unlike Collins or Stoker, he never produced a theatrical version of his late-Victorian bestseller nor collaborated on any.<sup>72</sup> The posthumous stage adaptations of *The Beetle* almost three decades after its initial publication completely lacked authorial input. The appearance of *Dracula* as a new stage production in 1924, may have provided impetus for bringing *The Beetle* to the boards, but a more likely inspiration would have been the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb by Petrie's protégé, Howard Carter in 1922, and the attendant mania for all things Egyptian.<sup>73</sup> The Pharaoh's cartouche shown in Figure V:5 even features a prominent scarab.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Greg Buzwell, 'Bram Stoker's Stage Adaptation of *Dracula* (15 May 2014) <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/bram-stokers-stage-adaptation-of-dracula>> [accessed 03 July 2021].

<sup>69</sup> *Dracula: Or The Un-Dead* (London: British Library Western Manuscripts, Ms Add 53630F); Buzwell.

<sup>70</sup> *Dracula: Or The Un-Dead*, Prologue. 8, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Henry Irving (1838-1905) was actor-manager at the Lyceum Theatre and employed Stoker for many years. See Buzwell, and Irving Society <<https://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk/>> [accessed 03 July 2021].

<sup>72</sup> The archive held at the University of Reading indicates the bulk of Marsh's dramatic output was comedic (Reading: University of Reading, The Richard Marsh Collection, MS 2051/35-52).

<sup>73</sup> After Stoker's death his widow sold the dramatic rights to *Dracula*. Irish actor and playwright, Hamilton Deane who had acted with Henry Irving's Company of Players and known the Stokers personally wrote a stage play of it. Deane's play toured the provinces from 1924 and was put on at The Little Theatre in London in July 1927. Also in 1927, *Dracula* was revised by John L. Balderston for Broadway where it starred Bela Lugosi in the title role. Balderston covered the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb in his capacity as a journalist. See Nicky Nielsen, *Egyptomaniacs: How We Became Obsessed with Ancient Egypt* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2020).

<sup>74</sup> There was a not altogether jocular proposal to call the London Underground extension passing through Tooting and Camden, the 'Tutancamden Line'. See Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (London: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1941).



Figure V:5

Cartouche of Tutankhamun

Detail: From Painted Wooden Chest  
Discovered in Antechamber to Tomb

Throughout the 1920s an Egyptian revival was inspiring the arts intellectually and materially, making its presence felt in Art Deco design motifs and ‘Nile Style’ architecture of public buildings.<sup>75</sup> To a canny theatre impresario, *The Beetle* must have seemed a good bet for a full house, but a dramatist handling the lengthy plot involving rape and human sacrifice had to be cautious of timings and of the censor, exactly as the film director needed to have been. In 1897, the same year Marsh wrote *The Beetle*, *Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol* had opened in Paris, and this macabre theatre of blood and horror was transplanted to the Little Theatre in London’s West End in the early 1920s, where it briefly flourished.<sup>76</sup> Acclaimed actress, Sybil Thorndyke was one of the leading players in this high profile, controversial project which she frequently found herself defending against accusations of morbidity and immorality. She claimed that to perform in it was as redemptive as entering a confessional, and she praised its cathartic aspect for actor and audience alike.<sup>77</sup> In 1922 Thorndyke complained to *The Observer* that the strictures of stage censorship

<sup>75</sup> See Billie Melman, *Empires of Antiquities: Modernity and the Rediscovery of the Ancient Near East, 1914-1950* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020); Chris Elliott, *Egypt in England* (Swindon: Historic England, 2012); Lant, 90.

<sup>76</sup> This was the same venue where *Dracula* was shown in 1927.

<sup>77</sup> See Jonathan Croall, *Sybil Thorndyke: A Star of Life* (London: Haus, 2008); Stewart Pringle, ‘Dame Sybil Thorndyke – London’s Queen of Screams’, *Theatre of the Damned* <<http://theatredamned.blogspot.com/2011/01/dame-sybil-thorndyke-londons-queen-of.html>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

were hampering theatrical creativity when even one of Noel Coward's Grand Guignol plays was rejected by the Lord Chamberlain as unsuitable for public performance. It was in the wake of this heated climate *The Beetle* was being revived and adapted for the stage.<sup>78</sup>

Censorship was bound to impact on the form taken by Marsh's story in the alternative medium of the theatre, causing gruesome and sexual aspects to be toned down. In film it is possible to fragment the visual field and focus on particular people or objects and, if necessary, steer the eye away from anything unpalatable. MacFarlane observes on-stage events occur in a fixed frame where everything is visible all at once except if a pin-focus light illuminates a single feature.<sup>79</sup> A fine balance must be struck between censorship compliance, artistic integrity, and audience engagement. In any dramatic adaptation, Marsh's monstrous Beetle is required to be both horrible and plausible within a heavily doctored plot. There were three attempts. None strove to make the insect sympathetic, but two exhibit greater understanding of the Egyptian woman than did the novel as I shall show.

On 29 July 1920, *The Stage* made the following brief announcement: 'The Beetle. Mr. Charles Freeman has procured the sole rights of the dramatised version of Richard Marsh's novel *The Beetle*, by arrangement with Mrs. Ada K. Marsh.'<sup>80</sup> Ada was Richard Marsh's widow. Five years later, the 1925 adaptation written by Charles Freeman and George King hit the provincial stage. It was performed on Christmas Eve at The Repertory Theatre, Plymouth, a former Mechanics Institute transformed into a theatre by the play's co-writer, George King. The venue is described by local historian Brian Moseley as having had 'a small stage and even smaller dressing rooms', which

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<sup>78</sup> Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *London's Grand Guignol and the Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> Brian MacFarlane, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> 'Chit Chat', *The Stage*, 29 July 1920, p. 12.

would have adversely impacted on what could be achieved in terms of Gothic horror.<sup>81</sup>

When the stage adaptation of *Dracula* premiered in 1924 in Derby and subsequently moved to The Little Theatre in London's West End, the Director, Hamilton Deane, reputedly had a nurse on standby to administer smelling salts in case any member of the theatre-going public passed out. It is not known whether similar precautions were taken for *The Beetle* a year later, but the production does seem to have done a reasonable job of bringing Marsh's work to life irrespective of the constraints of limited space. The first UK theatrical adaptation of the 1897 insect phenomenon was complimented by *The Stage* as being a 'thrilling and eerie version.'<sup>82</sup>

In the novel, Robert Holt falls under robotic control of the Beetle. In the 1925 play the insect is kept subservient to Nemo, the name given to the Egyptian priest. At Nemo's command, the supernatural scarab is reduced to little more than a weapon, like the mummy in Conan Doyle's 'Lot 249'. The Beetle is morally and physically diminished. Freeman and King's stage directions detail how green lights are to be shone on it to emphasise its nauseating hues, and how the desired ratio of size between insect and humans is to be achieved.

*[The Beetle is to be] (played by a small person concealed in mechanical figure.*

*NOTE—To make the Beetle appear smaller than it really is, the representatives of Lessingham and Holt should be very tall and well-built men).*<sup>83</sup>

The stage Beetle gives the impression of being an automaton even though a small person is hidden inside the artificial carapace. It is much like the inner workings of the

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<sup>81</sup> Brian Moseley, 'Repertory Theatre', *Old Plymouth UK*, <<http://www.oldplymouth.uk/Repertory%20Theatre.htm>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>82</sup> 'Provincial Productions', *The Stage*, Thursday 03 December 1925.

<sup>83</sup> Freeman and King, II. 1.



mechanical Turk.<sup>84</sup> In Cartesian terms, the insect appears a '*bête machine*' or animal machine, not sentient, not speaking, soulless and totally unfitted as a recipient of sympathy. It resembles less Marsh's living, feeling Beetle than his monstrous, murder-machine of *The Goddess*.

There is further stripping away of sympathetic potential because the Beetle is never allowed to play the physician. Holt already has a crust of bread in his pocket when he enters Nemo's and the Beetle's lair so there is no immediate requirement for medical intervention to assist a starving man. Percy Woodville, the novel's minor character of major importance, is omitted from the *dramatis personae* altogether meaning there is no opportunity for him to be resuscitated at Atherton's laboratory. Freeman and King edit out mitigating interactions between the Beetle and vulnerable men and focus only on negative encounters.

Holt apparently dies at Marjorie's house at the end of Act II having fallen foul of the Beetle, and Holt's re-appearance in the closing scene is inexplicable unless Freeman and King are over-anxious to offer final reassurance all is well. Their play concludes with Atherton suggesting the scarab has been a hallucination conjured into being by Lessingham's feverish imaginings which infect Holt and Marjorie as well as the audience who believe they have witnessed the creature with their own eyes. The last stage direction for Holt reads: '*(Produces four pieces of muddy black silk, stained red in places: they are obviously portions of an old umbrella covering.)*' Atherton's explanation for the Beetle is that it is a monster constructed out of detritus by mass hysteria:

fragments of umbrella coverings, muddy, partially burnt and apparently blood-stained! But you see that, pieced together, they do in a crude sort of fashion, assume the shape of a beetle [they are] merely discarded pieces of black silk' [original underlining].<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> The Mechanical Turk or Automaton Chess Player was exhibited until the middle of the nineteenth century. It looked like a machine with artificial intelligence, but in fact concealed a small person who operated its movements.

<sup>85</sup> Freeman and King, III.2, p. 39.

The insect is denied personhood altogether. Not even the lowest of animals, it is revealed to be a tawdry collection of worn-out things. The prevailing response is relief.

In October 1928, *The Beetle*, scripted by James Bernard Fagan, premiered at the Strand Theatre, London with higher production values and more widely known actors than its Devonian namesake.<sup>86</sup> Unsurprisingly it was more extensively reviewed. It showed every night at 8.30 pm with matinees on Tuesdays and Saturdays at 2.30 pm. It claimed to be 'Better than *Dracula*'.<sup>87</sup> Marsh's grandson recalls seeing the production. His anecdote indicates that, to one viewer at least, the entomological element was marginalised. When Aickman speaks of the 'central entity' played by Abraham Sofer, he is referring not to the insect, but to 'The Arab'.<sup>88</sup>

When a dramatisation by James Bernard Fagan appeared at the Strand Theatre in the 1920s, my Grandmother received a few pence, of right or of charity. Abraham Sofer did much for the central entity. Helena Pickard and Catherine Lacey charmed the infant me, as most actresses always have done before and since. "A ramshackle, jerky and enigmatic play," said Mr W.A. Darlington in the *Daily Telegraph*, much as critics have said of my own works in later years.<sup>89</sup>

Despite de-centralising the scarab, Fagan shows greater fidelity to Marsh's text than do Freeman and King, although the 1928 adaptation of *The Beetle* rearranges the novel's narratorial structure of overlapping action and delayed confessions to show events in chronological order. Fagan's play commences with a Prologue set in Egypt. Even before the curtain rises the audience is charmed by music. The stage direction indicates how, accompanied by a harp, 'a woman's voice, rich and low, is heard singing a French song from a light opera of twenty years ago'.<sup>90</sup> She is then revealed to be 'an Egyptian of unusually magnetic personality with deep-set

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<sup>86</sup> James Bernard Fagan, *The Beetle* [1928] (London, British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection, LCP 1928/38), Licence date: 24 August 1928. *The Stage* also credits input from Freeman and King.

<sup>87</sup> The unverifiable quote is attributed to *The Daily Mirror*.

<sup>88</sup> This casting information is gleaned from 'London Theatres', *The Stage*. Thursday 11 October 1928.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*. (Leyburn: Tartarus Press, 2013), p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Fagan, Opening stage direction.

*gleaming eyes*'.<sup>91</sup> Compared to readers of the novel, viewers of the 1928 play hear with their own ears the loveliness of the songs and see with their own eyes the beauty of the singer. If unconscious bias is being cultivated, it is tilted in the Beetle's favour, but then it is de-stabilised.

The audience also has access to the Egyptian's side comments to the older woman in the chamber. Bizarrely one stage direction reads: '*(In Arabic)* Bring the infidel another drink'.<sup>92</sup> The intention is presumably for the actress to speak with a foreign accent not in a foreign language. The freighted word 'infidel', used here and elsewhere to describe Lessingham, simultaneously positions him as a non-believer of the Muslim faith and antagonistic to the cult of Isis. He exclaims to the singing woman: 'What strange eyes you have', sounding like the fairy-tale innocent, Little Red Riding Hood.<sup>93</sup> There is a hint he too will overcome his animalistic would-be predator. The woman answers him with a mesmeric chant.

Strange—strange as Egypt is strange (*stroking his wrist*) where all is darkness—mystery—and the shadow of strange secrets flitting in the gloom. Look into my eyes—look—deep—deep—fair you are, and white O Englishman—look into my eyes and learn—learn of Egypt, of the mysteries of the dead—of the secrets of birth—of the hidden wonders of Isis, the beginning and the end.<sup>94</sup>

Her speech encapsulates ancient beliefs around the journey of the dead and the resurrection to an afterlife. Her eyes become agents of influence and communication, the synecdoche of her religion and culture. In later scenes, all that remains of her are those eyes in the form of two lights representing the insect automaton she has become, and this could be another way of construing the woman's tragedy.

The second scene of the Prologue moves to the hidden temple, where Khepri's icon is introduced in the '*immense golden bronze statue of Isis wearing a beetle on*

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<sup>91</sup> Fagan, Prologue, 1, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Fagan, Prologue, 1, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Fagan, Prologue, 1, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Fagan, Prologue, 1, p. 5.

*her forehead*'.<sup>95</sup> The singing woman is now dressed as a Priestess, and there is visual synergy with woman and goddess in their mutual insect adornment: '*In the centre of her forehead is the effigy of a beetle*'.<sup>96</sup> When, offstage to appease the censor, the scream of the sacrificial English girl shatters Lessingham's drug-induced lassitude, he puts to death the woman he believes to be an accessory to ritualistic murder. The directions for the strangulation and metamorphosis are precise.

*(With a sharp cry PAUL darts at her and his hands are round her throat and he suddenly bends her back over his knee. Suddenly her body goes limp, she sinks to the ground, and where she had stood is a monstrous beetle, scaly green and blue with blazing eyes and writhing legs).*<sup>97</sup>

The racialised and gendered violence is graphic and rapid as is evident in the repetition of the word '*suddenly*'. Female Arab suffering is momentarily packaged as spectacle, but immediately cancelled out by her spectacular transformation into a bug. The audience witnesses a murder it scarcely has time to come to terms with and is jolted into participating in Lessingham's justification for the crime.

Fagan's direction that the scarab be '*scaly*' is peculiar since it is an epithet more usually applicable to snakes than beetles. It betrays an impulse to interpret the Egyptian woman as a serpentine Lamia regardless of symbolic resonances of the species into which she does metamorphose. The colouration is equally problematic, not because beetle specimens of green and blue are absent in the natural world, but because blue interferes with the echo of the woman's yellowish skin and the nauseated faces of those with whom the insect comes into contact. Ignoring the gift of Marsh's colour connotations, Fagan's visual effect undermines emotional affect.

Fagan does not concern himself with the minutiae of how the switch from actress to beetle should be achieved, perhaps confident trapdoors, lighting, and the ingenuity of his production team will solve the problem of the live transfiguration. *The Scotsman*, having found the novel's Beetle 'impressively sinister', is singularly

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<sup>95</sup> Fagan, Prologue, 2, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Fagan, Prologue, 2, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> Fagan, Prologue, 2, p. 14.

unimpressed with the 1928 production: 'in the stage version it is as uninteresting as the common house-fly.'<sup>98</sup> The reviewer of *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph* is less concerned with the innocuousness of the insect than with the murder of the young Egyptian woman. It is one of very few commentaries that locates pity for the character, bemoaning '[t]he casual manner in which this suave Englishman does away with the priestess, who is a *sympathetic* figure' [my emphasis].<sup>99</sup> If singing woman and scarab are understood as two facets of one entity sharing the same soul, then it is not altogether outrageous to propose the insect as at least partially 'sympathetic'. Fagan's theatrical version may facilitate this interpretation because Nemo is the one exacting revenge whereas the mute insect is subaltern in servitude. This has its own sadness if we remember who the creature used to be.

Once Fagan's Prologue is over and his play proper unfolds, the Beetle is represented audibly by a '*droning sound*' and visually by a pair of lights crossing the stage with what is described as a '*waddling movement*'.<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, for the argument of my second chapter as to the Beetle's medical skills, the 1928 adaptation reinstates the role of physician as Nemo provides Holt with dry clothes, food and drink, and cures Woodville through the Heimlich manoeuvre and hypnotism. In relation to my third chapter's argument as to sex, Fagan points to the Beetle being female and sites the confirmatory event at Atherton's Laboratory exactly as in the book.

*(With a terrifying cry). Yes—the Beetle.*

*On the word, the droning sound is heard, the light goes swiftly down except a greenish blue light on the STRANGER who is transformed into a huge beetle with quivering legs and gleaming eyes [...] The figure slowly raises its arms with a commanding gesture, the burnoose slips from its head and shoulders falling to the ground and revealing the pale bronze-like figure of a woman, like the statue of Isis.*<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> 'London Theatres: The Beetle', *Scotsman*, 10 October 1928.

<sup>99</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 1928.

<sup>100</sup> Fagan, I.2, p. 19.

<sup>101</sup> Fagan, II, p. 18.

When Atherton recounts this miraculous occurrence to Lessingham in words directly lifted from the novel, it has the effect of casting him in the metatextual role of theatre critic: 'I saw the legendary Apotheosis of the Beetle performed, last night, before my eyes, with a gaudy magnificence at which the legends never hinted'.<sup>102</sup> Exposure of her naked body during transmigration establishes the Beetle is a woman, and in view of what the theatre audience has already witnessed in the Prologue, Paul Lessingham's surprise the Beetle is female comes across as even more disingenuous than in the novel.

PAUL:           Who is this individual whom you speak of as my—  
                          Oriental friend? What sort of man is he to look at?

ATHERTON:    I did not say it was a man.

PAUL:           But I presume it was a man.

ATHERTON:    I did not say so. [...] I supposed at first, that the  
                          individual in question was a man; but it appears that she  
                          is a woman.

PAUL:           a WOMAN!

ATHERTON:    Well, the face of a man's [sic]—of an uncommonly  
                          disagreeable type—and the voice is a man's—but the  
                          body, as last night I chanced to discover, is a  
                          woman's.<sup>103</sup>

In an unguarded moment in the novel, Lessingham lets slip he knows the Beetle is female when he panics Marjorie is at 'her mercy' [emphasis mine].<sup>104</sup> In the 1928 play the murdered Egyptian transforms into a creature of the same sex as her human self. Operating in a western society that values Classical Caucasian beauty, bronzed female ugliness may make her more pitiable.

A third dramatic adaptation of *The Beetle* by Leslie Howard Gordon toured the provinces in 1929.<sup>105</sup> Gordon's play makes Holt a drug addict, moves the mysterious

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<sup>102</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 144; Fagan, II, p. 26.

<sup>103</sup> Fagan, II, pp. 30-31. The play abridges the exchange in the novel, Marsh, *Beetle*, pp. 148-49.

<sup>104</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 225.

<sup>105</sup> Leslie Howard Gordon, *The Beetle* [22 January 1929] (London, British Library, Western Manuscripts Collection, LCP 1929/3).

house to Rotherhithe, and places events in Cairo only eight years previously as opposed to twenty, so they are less temporally remote than in the novel or in earlier theatrical versions.<sup>106</sup> In the second scene, Nemo, the 'man in the bed', presents an Egyptian perspective on events leading up to Lessingham's strangulation of the young Woman of the Songs.

HOLT: Who did he murder?

NEMO: A woman. One who loved him. There in my own country. When the green corn was springing and Isis the eternal mother had given to her son, the earth the kiss with which she wakens him each year. In that hour of rebirth, when all was life and the young moon was rocking in the cradle of the sky, he came, this great man of yours, trampling the young corn with death in his hands.

HOLT: I don't understand. What did he do?

NEMO: Have I not said he killed her.

HOLT: But why?

NEMO: She was a woman and she loved him. She was a priestess of our order, a child of Isis. He was a tall, strong, young man. There in Cairo they met. She told him of our little band of the Children of Isis. Her heart was snared, she showed him our temple—a thing his eyes should not have seen, and while we worshipped there and made offerings to our Mother Isis, he took her slim throat in his cruel hands and choked out her soul. There at the altar of the Eternal Mother, he did this! We looked for him then but he had gone back to his people, we could not strike. But as Horus belts the world and marks the seasons, so vengeance circles the offender and counts his days. The season and the time are here when this Paul Lessingham must pay his debt.<sup>107</sup>

Noteworthy is the positioning of Isis as a maternal figure associated with rebirth and the natural environment. Isis's followers are her children. Her Priestess is vulnerable prey, 'snared' by a predatory lover bringing destruction and death. Nemo's portrayal

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<sup>106</sup> The Lord Chamberlain's Office removed explicit references to heroin and replaced it with veronal.

<sup>107</sup> Gordon, I.2, p. 7.

in the 1929 play is every bit as biased as Lessingham's contrary account in the novel, and Nemo is only permitted to tug on the audience's heart strings for a brief spell. When it is made known that worship of Isis took the form of human sacrifice, sympathy for the Priestess who became an insect is wrenched away.

The Beetle is Nemo's familiar. They appear onstage at the same time, clarifying beyond any doubt the Egyptian Priest in London is separate to the transmigrating Priestess in Cairo. Gordon's stage direction reveals Nemo keeps the Beetle in a glass box, much as Corelli's sorrowful Satan did with his own supernatural scarab.

*(The box has a transparent slide, apparently glass, on the side towards the audience. The lime strikes down into it and in it can be seen the Beetle. Its antennae [sic] moving. It is a repulsive sight).*<sup>108</sup>

Nemo, in a volte face reminiscent of Rimanez, shifts from associating his Priestess-come-pet with wistful nature narratives of a nurturing goddess to presenting 'it' as the demonic epitome of everlasting evil: 'It is the sacred one of the children of Isis. It is the very soul of Isis. It is the immortal Evil of the world. It is THE BEETLE.'<sup>109</sup> His emphatic declaration is followed by the dramatic device of a blackout or quick curtain. Sympathy for the Egyptian woman and her avatar, having first been tentatively established, is unceremoniously switched off. The positive emotional lights go out.

Lessingham's version of events in Cairo follows in the next scene and is told to Atherton since Champnell is cut from the *dramatis personae*. His is the inverse of Nemo's account as he relates how he once found something almost holy in the young woman, but on discovering her involvement in the sacrifice of white Christian virgins, judged her so wicked he unilaterally condemned her to death. Marsh's Lessingham presents his relations with the Woman of the Songs as sexually deviant without genuine emotional attachment, however Gordon's Lessingham acknowledges the sincerity of her feelings towards him.

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<sup>108</sup> Gordon, I.2, p. 11.

<sup>109</sup> Gordon, I.2, p. 11.



I thought she was the most beautiful thing that God had ever made.  
[...]

Well, things went on and day by day I found myself more and more gripped by her. She got hold me [sic] utterly. I think—and that's one of the rottenest aspects of it—I think she was really deeply in love with me in her half savage way. What would have been the upshot of it all if things hadn't happened just the way they did, I don't know, but ... there came a day when ... I killed her.<sup>110</sup>

The 1929 theatre production avoids the on-stage depiction of Lessingham's violence and the woman's subsequent metamorphosis, making them a reported sequence of events. This, in comparison to Fagan's 1928 play, diffuses the shock of the strangulation and the drama of the transformation, both of which are essential components of the woman's story and influencers on its emotional affect.

Marsh's scarab is the animalistic metaphor most sympathetic to his plot on the printed page, however the incidental legacy for any dramatic adaptation is the conundrum of how to portray the insect on the stage. The 1928 drama solves the problem by using strong lights for mesmerising eyes and an audible droning sound for the insect buzz, but, apart from at the initial metamorphosis and at Atherton's laboratory, that is pretty much the extent of the Beetle's representation. Adopting the tactic of the 1925 adaptation, the 1929 play also positions a person of petite stature inside a movable contraption to bring the insect body to life. *The Stage* of 1929 carries an advertisement for a likely contender.

Wanted, a Boy over 14 years or a Dwarf, about 3ft 1 in., to appear in Mechanical Beetle and small part. Apply letter only, stating exact height and lowest terms, to ARTHUR GIBBONS Royalty Theatre W.I.<sup>111</sup>

The Beetle is a mechanical device figuratively containing the soul of a Priestess of Isis and literally enclosing the small body of a low-rent actor cramped into a confined

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<sup>110</sup> Gordon, I.3, p. 30.

<sup>111</sup> Wanted Advertisement, *The Stage*, 03 January 1929.

space for the duration of the performance. On that account, even if on no other, the theatrical insect's overheated contortions and the small actor's physical discomfort should be deserving of sympathy. In the final scene of Gordon's play, Nemo speaks eloquently of the sacrilege perpetrated on his people by the 'barbarian' and 'beastly' colonisers and is led away to face six years in prison. Meanwhile, Detective Inspector Rogers enlightens characters and audience how the onstage Beetle was created.

ROGERS        This is a model: It's just a shell. Look, its painted canvas.  
*(He places his hand under the beetle and turns it over. Lying on the floor  
 beneath the thing is the huddled body of a dark skinned dwarf. He is  
 quite dead).*<sup>112</sup>

Lessingham, in having shot what he believes to be a creature of lower sentience, has committed another murder, but as the stage direction tells us: '*Rogers has carried the body of the dwarf off by door R*'.<sup>113</sup> No-one in the play seems troubled by it. The non-white subject forced to play the insect is once again presented as of negligible value.

As something of a postscript to the three 1920s stage adaptations of *The Beetle*, on the centenary of the novel's first publication, BBC Radio 4 broadcast a ninety-minute version dramatised for radio by Roger Danes.<sup>114</sup> Once again there is a tripartite division of the Beetle into male, female, and bug. The Egyptian shapeshifter is predominantly voiced by the late Hugh Dickson adopting an exaggeratedly eastern accent. The more wistful interjections, lustful advances, and Cairene songs are voiced by Alison Pettit. The insect aspect is only heard in fluttering rather than buzzing noises and evoked in abbreviated descriptions lifted from the novel. The phrase 'noxious insect' is never used. Explicit pestiferousness is absent. There is not a hint of beauty or mystery so those balancing aspects are missing too. Neither affective loathsomeness nor lovelorn anguish penetrate this shallow offering shaped by stereotyped attitudes. Chanting for Isis echoing the Muezzin's call to prayer is an

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<sup>112</sup> Gordon, III, p. 34.

<sup>113</sup> Gordon, III, p. 34.

<sup>114</sup> Roger Danes and Richard Marsh, *The Beetle*, BBC Radio 4, 15 March 1997; 02 November 2014.

efficient way of aurally conveying the compression of religious time in Egypt, however its combination with the faux accent of the Englishman playing the Arab risks making the radio play more offensively unsympathetic to a modern, multicultural audience than anything written by Marsh.

The adaptations of *The Beetle* up to and including the radio play represent direct evolution of Marsh's novel, and the final section of this chapter considers divergent evolution of the insect metaphor in texts, films and plays not explicitly referencing Marsh's creature, yet resembling her in genus and/or subalternity and/or monstrosity. Initially, the discussion of these other afterlives of *The Beetle* returns to nearer contemporaneous works to that of Marsh, and then transitions through the twentieth and early twenty-first century, assessing how warm or cold is the sympathetic environment in which the insects are located.

### **Discovering the Insect's Perspective in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Beyond**

Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* seized the public imagination to such an extent that in the UK alone it spawned one cinematic, three theatrical, and one radio offspring, but these adaptations with their unholy Priest-woman-insect trinities, pantomime props, mechanical devices, lurid lighting, and crude sound effects bear only a limited resemblance to their progenitor. They seem to have fallen victim to a qualitative reductionism with the insect being the worst casualty of all. To adopt the phraseology of Thierry Groensteen appropriated by Linda Hutcheon, the Beetle creature may simply not have been "adaptogenic".<sup>115</sup>

Legitimate heirs to Marsh's text may reside elsewhere than in the adaptations. I do not mean in curse narratives such as Vincent O'Sullivan's 'Will' (1899) in which an enormous red-eyed beetle exciting 'loathing and disgust', an 'abhorred monster',

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<sup>115</sup> Thierry Groensteen, cited in Hutcheon (2013), p. 15.

exacts vengeance on a husband for his wife's death.<sup>116</sup> I discover a vibrant afterlife in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, written in German only fifteen years after *The Beetle*, and analogous to it in being about a person who becomes a giant insect.<sup>117</sup> Ironically, Marsh himself wrote a novel called *A Metamorphosis*, but the title is only a metaphor for the taking on of a false identity, not a physiological transformation.<sup>118</sup> Although its protagonist is held captive by a yellow-toothed foreign woman with animalistic repulsiveness, its lack of insect imagery means it does not merit further discussion here.<sup>119</sup>

There are surprisingly few parallel readings of *The Beetle* and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* despite the fact they are prime examples of what Dorothy Scarborough calls 'entomological supernaturalism', of which she finds Marsh's bestseller the most 'curdling example'.<sup>120</sup> According to Fred Botting, '[s]ome of the most disturbingly Gothic images of the twentieth century appear in the writings of Franz Kafka'.<sup>121</sup> Both Marsh's and Kafka's texts are readable as entomologised Gothic, and, in comparing the two, this latter part of the chapter moves its focus away from Egyptianised Gothic.

Approaching from the direction of Kafka studies and unaware of the resurgence of *The Beetle*, Patrick Bridgwater concentrates on the folkloric aspect of the metamorphoses and his reading in *Kafka, Gothic and Fairytale* is unusual in even mentioning Marsh's novel.<sup>122</sup> 'From that little known example of horror literature

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<sup>116</sup> Vincent O'Sullivan, 'Will', in *The Green Window* (London: Leonard Smithers & Co., 1899), pp. 83-89 (pp. 87, 88).

<sup>117</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. by Susan Bernofsky (London: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2014). According to Max Brod's diary, Kafka read the story aloud to friends in November 1912. See Susan Bernofsky, 'On Translating Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"', *New Yorker* (14 January 2014), <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/on-translating-kafkas-the-metamorphosis> [accessed 06 August 2021].

<sup>118</sup> Richard Marsh, *A Metamorphosis* (London: Methuen & Co, 1903).

<sup>119</sup> The bovine, rat-like 'villainess', Donna Luisa is not insectile.

<sup>120</sup> Dorothy Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (London: G. P Putnam, 1917), p. 290.

<sup>121</sup> Botting, *Gothic*, p. 104.

<sup>122</sup> Patrick Bridgwater, *Kafka, Gothic and Fairytale* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, Brill Academic Pub, 2003).

dating from the Gothic revival of the 1890s it is a far cry to Kafka's differently realised, but no less chilling study of Samsa', the protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*.<sup>123</sup> From the direction of Marsh studies, a slightly more extended comparative analysis occurs in Freya Verlander's 'Beetle Skins: The Beetle and the Male Body', in which she argues that both Marsh's and Kafka's bugs can be understood in terms of a 'skinning' of the male exterior to expose the female interior, and by extension the gendered female architectural spaces they occupy.<sup>124</sup> My side-by-side examination of the two oversized insects is firmly rooted in Marsh scholarship, and the inclusion of Kafka's novella in this thesis is by no means intended as an exhaustive study of *The Metamorphosis*.

I position the Beetle and Gregor Samsa as foils to one another. Both undergo entomological transformations insinuating they endured not dissimilar circumstances in their pre-insect state. Even though Warner does not include Marsh in *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, she suggests Kafka 'absorbed the metaphoric process of hatching in order to tell of a different kind of human person, who is precisely manifest in the larva, nymph and cocoon'.<sup>125</sup> She argues of Gregor, 'his beetle shape suits him, expresses an essence of Samsa'.<sup>126</sup> Were Gregor to have become a slug not a bug, or the Beetle to have taken the cobra form of Isis instead of a scarab, the analogy would not hold.<sup>127</sup> 'Transmogrification into a bug', as Warner puts it, is as significant for Marsh as for Kafka.<sup>128</sup> W. R. Irwin notes that in tales of metamorphosis there is, 'despite some variation, a marked uniformity. Usually the change is from a higher form of life to a lower, though the second form often has some self-evident relationship, physical or

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<sup>123</sup> Bridgwater, p. 166.

<sup>124</sup> Freya Verlander, 'Beetle Skins: The Beetle and the Male Body in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', *HARTS & Minds: The Journal of Humanities and Arts*, 3.2 (2017), 65-82.

<sup>125</sup> Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p. 24. Insect life cycles are either holometabolous (egg-larva-pupa-adult) or hemimetabolous (egg-nymph-adult): they never combine larva, nymph and cocoon.

<sup>126</sup> Warner, p. 115.

<sup>127</sup> Isis-Thermouthis also known as Isis-Renenutet is a cobra goddess depicted as having a human upper-body and snake's tail or a woman's body with a cobra's head. Her gaze was said to kill her enemies.

<sup>128</sup> Warner, p. 115.

moral, to the first.<sup>129</sup> Becoming insect of two characters is a statement about the essence of their human selves.

Bug magnification disrupts species demarcations ordinarily visible in the human insect size ratio. Entomological enlargement in *The Beetle* and *The Metamorphosis* makes disparate bodily dimensions between central character and others more equivalent, potentially facilitating pity, but it also draws attention to perceived insect grotesqueness functioning as a vehicle for horror. There are marked similarities between the Beetle and Gregor, yet their common situatedness in a textual environment of hostile intolerance generates very different sympathetic affects outside of it. The chilly or warm emotional response from readers is largely consequent upon authorial treatments of their plight.

*The Beetle* had been available in German as *Der Skarabäus* since 1900 and, however fanciful it may be to speculate Kafka encountered Marsh's novel and took inspiration from its plot, it is undeniable he had the opportunity to read *The Beetle* in his native tongue for several years before *The Metamorphosis* emerged from its cocoon. Certainly, Kafka's short story, 'Wedding Preparations in the Country' (1907) tests out the idea of a character imagining himself turned into a beetle and sending out a human body to do his bidding in almost identical fashion to the way Marsh's Beetle uses Holt.<sup>130</sup>

As I lie in bed I assume the shape of a big beetle, a stag beetle or a cockchafer [...]

The form of a large beetle, yes. Then I would pretend it was a matter of hibernating and I would press my little legs to my bulging belly. And I would whisper a few words, instructions to my sad body, which stands close beside me, bent.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> W. R. Irwin, 'The Metamorphoses of David Garnett', *PMLA*, 73-4 (1958), 386-392 (p. 386).

<sup>130</sup> Franz Kafka, 'Wedding Preparations in the Country', in *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, trans. by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), pp. 2-34. Only three fragments survive.

<sup>131</sup> Kafka, 'Wedding Preparations', pp. 6-7.

Parallels with *The Beetle* are marked in terms of the insect's taxonomic order and enlarged size, the protagonist's location in bed and the psychic link with a human automaton. *The Metamorphosis* would re-visit all but the last of those themes.

*The Metamorphosis* is a story written by a Jewish man in a Czech city in the German language, and for this reason Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe it as constituting a minor literature. 'A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language'.<sup>132</sup> Dan Miron describes the awkward process in *The Animal in the Synagogue*: 'German-Jewish writing was like an insect whose front legs flailed while its back legs remained firmly glued to the traditions of its fathers.'<sup>133</sup> The very act of writing is expressed as entomological in essence, linguistically alienating the author from their religious roots and present geographical location. For Kafka, the entomological struggle to write is also embodied in insect subject matter.

There is no better summary of the plot of *The Metamorphosis* than its own opening sentence, quoted in German and then in English.<sup>134</sup> 'Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt.'<sup>135</sup> Susan Bernofsky translates it as: 'When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed right there in his bed into some sort of monstrous insect.'<sup>136</sup> Stanley Corngold prefers 'monstrous vermin'.<sup>137</sup> Quoting the original German emphasises the

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<sup>132</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 16.

<sup>133</sup> Dan Miron, *The Animal in the Synagogue: Franz Kafka's Jewishness* (London: Lexington Books, 2019), p. 130.

<sup>134</sup> There are multiple translations. See W. B. Gooderham, 'Kafka's Metamorphosis and its Mutations in Translation', *Guardian* (13 May 2015), <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/may/13/kafka-metamorphosis-translations>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>135</sup> Franz Kafka, 'Die Verwandlung [Metamorphosis]' in *Das Urteil und andere Erzählungen* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag), pp. 19-73 (p. 19).

<sup>136</sup> Kafka, *Metamorphosis* trans. Bernofsky, p. 21.

<sup>137</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. and ed. by Stanley Corngold (New York NY: Bantam Books Ltd, 1972), p. 3.

repetition of the 'un' prefixes in 'unruhigen', 'ungeheuren' and 'Ungeziefer'. Gregor's dreams are not peaceful; he is a creature not the proper size or in the proper place; he is an unspecific verminous insect not fit to be a sacrifice.<sup>138</sup> The negatory 'un' adjectives and noun are not signalling evil nothingness such as Simon Marsden thought he discovered in his Augustinian critique of *The Beetle*. They are erasing Gregor right from the start.

Deleuze and Guattari consider the change to be a terminal prognosis: 'Gregor's metamorphosis [...] turns his becoming-animal [or more precisely becoming-insect] into becoming-dead.'<sup>139</sup> This is a reversal of the Beetle's metamorphosis which turns becoming dead into becoming insect. Towards the close of Kafka's novella, the remains of malnourished, disheartened, flattened Gregor are disposed of like garbage. At the end of Marsh's novel, the Beetle may escape the train crash or she may finally become dead too. Perhaps on this last occasion she is crushed before being able to complete the metamorphosis into monstrous insect, which accounts for the uncertain traces she leaves behind her. Becoming-scarab of the Woman of the Songs constitutes rebirth or foreshadows slow extinction or is maybe a combination of the two. The iconography of Isis and Khepri suggest persistent survival is the most likely.

Becoming 'noxious insect' of Marsh's Egyptian woman saves her life in Cairo, but that recourse does not preclude the change being a manifestation of abasement comparable to becoming 'monstrous insect' in Kafka, at least in part. There is resemblance between the Beetle and Gregor, and it may be more than merely physical. Having said that, I must clarify that descriptions of Gregor within the text and Kafka's references outside of it are not to a beetle *per se*. According to the diary of Kafka's friend, biographer, and literary executor, Max Brod, he called *The Metamorphosis* his 'Wanzensache', or bug piece and never mentioned any species.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> The derivation of this last definition comes from Old High German.

<sup>139</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 36.

<sup>140</sup> See Bernofsky, 'On Translating Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" '.



Kafka was vehement with the publisher of his slim volume there could be no illustration that might interfere with imaginative identification. 'The insect cannot be drawn. It cannot be drawn even as if seen from a distance.'<sup>141</sup>

Vladimir Nabokov, having given much consideration to the morphology of Kafka's metamorphosed man, is certain that no matter with what vagueness the author and protagonist envisage the arthropod, the story is about the 'monstrous change' of 'coleopteran Gregor.'<sup>142</sup> Nabokov's voice, backed by his rare combination of entomological and literary skills, is a formidable one. Having established Gregor is a 'jointed legger', he imposes order on the insect as well as an unwanted visual image, and declares him to be a beetle:

what insect? Commentators say *cockroach*, which of course does not make sense. A cockroach is an insect that is flat in shape with large legs, and Gregor is anything but flat: he is convex on both sides, belly and back, and his legs are small. [...] he has a tremendous convex belly divided into segments and a hard rounded back suggestive of wing cases. In beetles these cases conceal flimsy little wings that can be expanded and then may carry the beetle for miles and miles in a blundering flight. [...] Further, he has strong mandibles. He uses these organs to turn the key in a lock while standing erect on his hind legs [...] and this gives us the length of his body, which is about three feet long. [...] This brown, convex, dog-sized beetle is very broad. I should imagine him to look like this<sup>143</sup>

Figure V:6 shows Nabokov's accompanying sketch.

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<sup>141</sup> Letter from Franz Kafka to Georg Heinrich Meyer dated 25 October 1915, in *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans Richard and Clare Winston (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1977), p. 115.

<sup>142</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, 'Franz Kafka "The Metamorphosis"', in *Lectures on Literature* (London: Mariner Books, 1982), pp. 251-83 (p. 266).

<sup>143</sup> Nabokov, pp. 259-60.

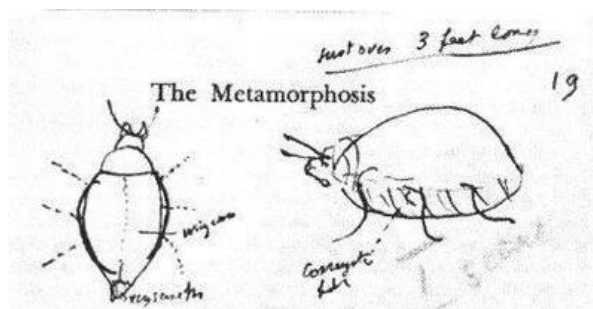


Figure V:6

Sketch of Gregor Samsa.

Vladimir Nabokov, 'Franz Kafka  
"The Metamorphosis"'

Within the text the charwoman refers to Gregor as a *Mistkäfer* or dung beetle. Her assessment does not appear to be founded on scientific expertise. David Cronenberg, director of body-horror movie, *The Fly*, invited by Bernofsky to introduce her translation, shares the charwoman's hunch Gregor is 'probably of the scarab family'.<sup>144</sup> Norman Holland argues for it persuasively. 'The dung-beetle was the one animal that gave Kafka everything he needed: total metamorphosis [...] plus the combination of loathsomeness and divinity.'<sup>145</sup> Holland shows appreciation for its gamut of cultural ramifications. In Marsh there is even stronger justification for the use of a North-African dung beetle since his central character is herself Egyptian. Critics and translators of Kafka are divided about his bug species and Nabokov takes issue with the charwoman's presumptive taxonomy. He maintains Gregor is merely a big brown beetle. In the final reckoning it matters less whether Gregor is a dung beetle, a brown beetle or just a verminous bug who has undergone Messianic transubstantiation or a fairy-tale transformation. What matters most for this thesis is that he is a close family relative to Marsh's insect.

Nabokov's likening of 'dog-sized' Gregor to a domestic pet is significant in the context of Briton Rivière's *Sympathy*. I argued earlier that Rivière's sentimental animal painting would be horrifically altered if, instead of a dog resting its head on a girl's shoulder, a dog-sized beetle were to be performing that act. Ironically that horrifying

<sup>144</sup> David Cronenberg, 'Introduction: The Beetle and the Fly', in Kafka, *Metamorphosis* trans. Bernofsky, pp. 9-17. (p. 9).

<sup>145</sup> Norman Holland, 'Realism and Unrealism: Kafka's *Metamorphosis*', *Modern Fiction Studies* (Summer 1959), 143-30 (p. 149).

image is identical to the scenario desired by Gregor. In full awareness of his transformation into 'some sort of monstrous insect', he nevertheless projects a future where, in Corngold's more accurate translation, his sister 'should sit beside him on the couch, bending her ear down to him, [...] and Gregor would raise himself up to her shoulder and kiss her on the neck'.<sup>146</sup> Bernofsky replaces 'shoulder' with 'armpit' imposing on Gregor's reverie an erogenous quality.<sup>147</sup> The act is at once innocent and invasive, even quasi incestuous. Moreover, it is reminiscent of what occurs when the Beetle climbs Robert Holt. Marsh positions the Beetle as loving and loathsome with legs exuding 'some adhesive substance' which, as she ascends, 'embraced [him] softly, stickily'.<sup>148</sup> Gregor too leaves 'sticky trails' on the walls and would have done the same on his beloved violin-playing Grete if she had willingly let him mount her body.<sup>149</sup>

The Beetle and Gregor are the same biological class, monstrous insects with the same bodily secretions that generate the same affect. Holt loses consciousness. Gregor's mother also faints at the mere sight of her bug son as he defends the picture of a woman becoming animalistically absorbed into her furs. His 'hot belly' presses against the glass that protects the image from being soiled in what is a monstrous parody of sexual intercourse.<sup>150</sup> Even after his mother's reaction to his appearance, Gregor still thinks intimacy with his sticky-legged, exoskeletal self and exposure to his lip-less mandibles that cannot kiss will be welcomed by his sister. He is hopelessly deluded in thinking close proximity could ever induce in her anything other than the nauseated recoil which is the invariable reaction to the Beetle. But, because the dominant perspective of *The Metamorphosis* is of a pitiable man transformed into an insect, and not a horrified recipient of insect advances as in *The Beetle*, Kafka's reader

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<sup>146</sup> Kafka, *Metamorphosis* trans Corngold, p. 49.

<sup>147</sup> Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Bernofsky, p. 102. 'Achsel' in German means 'shoulder', Kafka, *Verwandlung* p.64.

<sup>148</sup> Marsh, *Beetle*, p. 17.

<sup>149</sup> Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Bernofsky, p. 71.

<sup>150</sup> Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Bernofsky, p. 77.

experiences something verging on regret that Gregor's idyll of sympathetic siblings must remain unrealised.

Kafka applied the same verminous epithet, '*Ungeziefer*' to himself and to his character.<sup>151</sup> *The Metamorphosis* is not a first-person account however the author offers unrestricted access to the interiority of the exhausted travelling salesman living at home with the family he financially supports. Warner understands Gregor's entomological transformation to be 'a means of communicating a profoundly altered concept of the self'.<sup>152</sup> The domestic setting facilitates the reader projecting themselves into physical and psychological suffering in which every thought, emotion, sensation is laid bare and the man's changing state is experienced, as Warner puts it, 'viscerally, from the inside, as it were'.<sup>153</sup> *The Beetle*, on the other hand, contains a series of entomological transformations from the outside, the first alien event having taken place long before the novel's narrative present in a far-flung, Gothicised location. Whatever agonies, if any, the Woman of the Songs undergoes in exchanging human physiology for insect morphology are discounted by hostile observers. Hers are big bug metamorphoses constructed to reinforce the concept of the Other.

Shapeshifting appears to be under the Beetle's control whereas Gregor's seemingly involuntary metamorphosis happens to him while sleeping. This might give the impression of being a point of clear differentiation, however that interpretation may be too simplistic. Irving Massey takes an overview of the trope of literary metamorphosis and generalises even if a character makes a choice whether to transform 'it is a choice between difficult alternatives: usually a desperate choice'.<sup>154</sup> Nabokov argues of Gregor: '[t]he pathetic urge to find some protection from betrayal, cruelty, and filth is the factor that went to form his carapace'.<sup>155</sup> This is exactly what I

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<sup>151</sup> See Corngold, 'Introduction', p. xix; Bernofsky, 'On Translating Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.'

<sup>152</sup> Warner, p. 115.

<sup>153</sup> Warner, p. 113.

<sup>154</sup> Irving Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (London: University of California Press, 1976), p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> Nabokov, p. 261.

argue for the Beetle. In Marsh and Kafka, there is a combination of volition, desperation, and external compulsion in the bodily changes of both their characters.

Deleuze and Guattari perceive Gregor's changing to be a breaking away, a 'deterritorialisation'; 'the whole becoming-animal of Gregor, his becoming beetle, junebug, dungbeetle, cockroach, which traces an intense line of flight in relation to the familial triangle but especially in relation to the bureaucratic and commercial triangle'.<sup>156</sup> They elaborate on this point. 'We would say that for Kafka, the animal essence is the way out, the line of escape, even if it takes place in place, or in a cage. A line of escape and not freedom.'<sup>157</sup> Perhaps in desperation Gregor instigates his own transformation, the single irreversible event for which his text is named. Even though his becoming-insect is becoming-dead, there is an alternative outcome alluded to by Nabokov as well as by Deleuze and Guattari in which Gregor might have discovered his wings and flown the nest. On the surface the Beetle appears powerful, and Gregor appears vulnerable. It is on such apparent absolutes that contrasting emotional reactions are predicated, however absolutes can be deceptive. Both bugs were subaltern victims of oppressive systems who metamorphose into incomprehensible insects, and whose communications and intentions are interpreted not always accurately by those around them. Beetlehood offers the only means of escape but utterly rules out natural human interaction.<sup>158</sup> On that basis, both merit sympathy even if ordinarily they do not both receive it.

*The Beetle* and *The Metamorphosis* are post-Darwinian texts, and Kafka had certainly read Darwin and Huxley.<sup>159</sup> Fabulous transformations such as Gregor's and the Beetle's are effectively fictional portrayals of evolution supernaturally speeded up, in which becoming insect is an adaptation brought about by an intolerable

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<sup>156</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 14.

<sup>157</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 35.

<sup>158</sup> Bernofsky describes Gregor as a 'cartoon of the subaltern', Susan Bernofsky, 'Afterword', in Kafka, *Metamorphosis* trans. Bernofsky, p. 125.

<sup>159</sup> See Margot Norris, 'Kafka's Hybrids: 'Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans', in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings* eds. Max Lucht and Donna Yaari (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Litchfield, 2020), pp. 17-32 (p. 19).

environment. Gillian Beer notes in *Darwin's Plots*: 'Metamorphosis bypasses death. The concept expresses continuance, survival, the essential self transposed, but not obliterated by transformation'.<sup>160</sup> Beer is talking about the gradual Darwinian process and not the fantastic leaps of fiction, however her comment prompts an avenue of investigation into Marsh and Kafka in terms of how much the essential human self is transposed into the acquired insect bodies, and how much obliterated.

Chris Danta's *Animal Fables After Darwin* positions Darwinism as a new Aesopism which exposes the animality of humans as well as the converse.<sup>161</sup> In beast fables there is a covert battle for territory within the anthropomorphised animal bodies, and Danta refers to this as: 'reverse colonisation of the human by the animal — for what the animal does in Kafka is to invade, displace, and decontextualise the human'.<sup>162</sup> Gregor retains a human affection for the picture he framed with a manual dexterity now forever lost. He also experiences an insect pleasure in crawling the walls and swinging from the ceiling. In Marsh and Kafka, aspects of both species appear to co-exist in the contested physical space of the protagonist's body. The question unanswered in *The Beetle* is whether it is uncertainty about the retained human proportion which problematises compassionate understanding of the shapeshifting scarab or whether she is repellent no matter what form she takes.

Corelli's sorrowful Satan detects the human soul in the insect and insect souls in the humans. Nabokov finds the same in *The Metamorphosis*. 'Gregor is a human in an insect's disguise; his family are insects disguised as people'.<sup>163</sup> Notwithstanding Nabokov was an entomologist, his is a profoundly anthropocentric conceit. He perceives a clear hybridisation in Kafka's bug, the extent of which is never made clear in Marsh's Beetle. 'Kafka's art consists in accumulating on the one hand Gregor's insect features, all the sad detail of his insect disguise, and on the other, in keeping

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<sup>160</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 104.

<sup>161</sup> Chris Danta, *Animal Fables After Darwin* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018).

<sup>162</sup> Danta, p. 131.

<sup>163</sup> Nabokov, p. 280.

vivid and limpid before the reader's eyes Gregor's sweet and subtle human nature.'<sup>164</sup> Confusingly, Gregor's insect disguise sometimes breaks down and his last breath is described as coming from his 'nostrils', an impossibility for a nose-less bug that will 'smell' through antennae and breathe through spiracles. Granting Nabokov's premise to be true regardless of the occasional anomaly in the text, it is unsurprising sympathetic identification tends to be directed towards Kafka's outer insect. He is after all in possession of inner human sensitivity and human shame. In the Beetle it is denied such sensations remain or indeed ever existed. Her human nature seems sour, unsubtle, and unsympathetic because redeeming aspects are virtually impenetrable behind the thickness of her carapace. Within *The Metamorphosis*, the last vestige of familial consideration for Gregor dies when his sister declares the 'Untier' (linguistically the non-animal monster) no longer to be worthy of her brother's name, and 'er'/'he' becomes 'es'/'it'.<sup>165</sup> Gregor is stripped of personhood. Through this distancing mechanism, the brother-son-bug becomes a thing, just as does the woman-Priestess-scarab. Although it may be possible to project emotion into an object and feel sympathy for it, the Samsa family do not.

Danta regards Kafka as 'a kind of literary zoographer [...] who genuinely wonders what it is like to be an animal and how this act of sympathetic identification with the nonhuman affects our idea of the human.'<sup>166</sup> Danta's opinion goes far beyond locating sympathy for human elements within a hybrid insect and approaches what it means to experience fellow feeling for the insect alone, a subject to which I shall return in my conclusion. Margot Norris in *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* envisages Kafka writing in this biocentric tradition 'as the animal not *like* the animal, in imitation of the animal — but with their animality speaking' [original emphasis].<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Nabokov, p. 270.

<sup>165</sup> Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*, p. 67; *Kafka, Metamorphosis* trans. Bernofsky, p. 105. According to Corngold this nicety is an editorial imposition on the text by Max Brod, and the original manuscript refers to Gregor as 'it'/'es' all the all the way through. See Corngold's notes in *Kafka, Metamorphosis* ed. Corngold, p. 74.

<sup>166</sup> Danta, p. 26.

<sup>167</sup> Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins UP, 1985), p. 1.

The same could never be said of Marsh. Were his subaltern scarab to inhabit a biocentric text instead of a Gothic one, she might speak directly of her experience in the insect state, re-appropriate her animality and lay proper claim to her own unfiltered narrative.

A contemporary insect of Gregor who finds a way to communicate in the first person is Archy, the big bug created by New Yorker, Don Marquis in 1916, the very same year *The Beetle* was published by Brentano's of New York.<sup>168</sup> *Die Verwandlung* had not at that time been translated into English. Kafka is therefore very unlikely to have been an influence on Marquis, though Marsh easily could have been.<sup>169</sup> E. B. White, author of the children's book *Charlotte's Web*, concerning a different kind of arthropod, was an admirer of Marquis and felt him to have been a much-underrated writer.<sup>170</sup> This thesis may as an incidental activity partially help re-invigorate him.

Archy is a 'gigantic cockroach' not imagined on the same exaggerated scale as the Beetle or Gregor, but a plausible size for a real insect.<sup>171</sup> Even though within the text, the mummy of a pharaoh at the Metropolitan Museum mistakenly identifies him as a 'little scatter footed scarab', Archy's species identity is never in doubt to anyone else least of all himself.<sup>172</sup> His associate is Mehitabel, an Egyptian seductress reincarnated as an alley cat in a swipe at Orientalist stereotyping. The insect and his Cleopatra-channelling companion could loosely be said to represent two aspects of the Beetle. Setting aside for a while the different associations of cockroaches and scarabs, this thesis incorporates Archy for: his mental torture at being reborn in the corpus of a bug; equating an insect state with sin; highlighting insectile parallels with

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<sup>168</sup> Louis Halsey, 'Don Marquis: Ambivalent Humorist', *Prairie Schooner*, 45.1 (Spring, 1971), 59-73 (p. 73).

<sup>169</sup> The editor makes the point respecting Kafka. See Michael Sims, 'introduction' in Don Marquis, *The Annotated Archy and Mehitabel* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2006), xiii-xxxvi (p. xxi).

<sup>170</sup> White's well-known story is about a spider. E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952).

<sup>171</sup> Marquis, *Archy*, p. 4.

<sup>172</sup> Marquis, *Archy*, p. 273.



racially inflected politics; and exploring the ethics of vivisection. These are considerations already raised as overtly or covertly present in *The Beetle*.

Archy's is the creative soul of a freeform poet transmigrated into the speechless, subaltern state of a cockroach. Edward Martin in his article subtitled, 'Don Marquis, Archy and Anarchy', comments on his dual nature as noxious insect and sensitive soul. 'As an insect Archy is an upsetting nuisance; he threatens frequently to become an unsavory pest [...] As a poet he is both an articulate rational creature, and like his master driven by an inner romantic intensity'.<sup>173</sup> Archy ventriloquises Marquis, and the writer circumvents the insect's inability to speak through the ingenious device of having him produce words by jumping on typewriter keys with his whole weight or butting against them with his head. By this laborious method, Archy communicates his thoughts to the author cum journalist, and his messages break through the fictional framework to become actual newspaper columns in the *New York Evening Sun* and *New York Tribune* across WW1 and the Depression. Martin regards them as essentially beast fables.<sup>174</sup> The *New York Tribune's* cartoon welcoming Archy to the paper is shown in Figure V:7. It depicts a hybrid character of Marquis fused with his insect creation. The illustrated bug is far too big and Archy's accompanying column expresses indignation the image makes his typing look effortless, instead of the slow and painful exercise he knows it to be. He writes without punctuation and in the lower case in a style dictated by practical concerns since he is too small to be capable of activating the shift key and a letter key at the same time.<sup>175</sup> The manually depressed keys require a minimum level of physical strength, and in exposing Archy's limitations, Marquis demonstrates his insect, in comparison to the Beetle or Gregor Samsa, is neither unnatural nor supernatural.

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<sup>173</sup> Edward A. Martin, 'A Puritan's Satanic Flight: Don Marquis, Archy and Anarchy', *Sewanee Review*, 83.4 (Fall, 1975), 623-42 (p. 636).

<sup>174</sup> 'Martin, 635.

<sup>175</sup> Archy's style also swipes at the avant-garde poetry his human self might be supposed to have written. e e cummings famously used a lower case 'i' and very sparse punctuation, however his first collection of poetry was not published until 1923.



Figure V:7

*Archy, New York Tribune*

(11 September 1922)

Image courtesy of John Batteiger

Marquis the journalist writes in prose. Archy ordinarily finds expression in free verse:

i was once a vers libre bard  
 but i died and my soul went into the body of a cockroach  
 it has given me a new outlook on life  
 i see things from the underside now <sup>176</sup>

Sympathy tends to emanate from above and be dispensed to those below. For Archy this spatial orientation is reversed. He is the lowest of the low and writes from the underside, from which perspective he witnesses societal injustice, and, through the expression of his moral outrage, attempts to change behaviours. He is an ironic, philosophising bug who champions the poor and oppressed irrespective of species, and, in this way, could be regarded as the epitome of the sympathetic insect actively giving sympathy. Unfortunately, humankind does not respond in a similarly sympathetic way to him. His grotesque ugliness renders him unworthy of the tolerance afforded to insects with butterfly beauty or dragonfly charm. He even becomes the victim of Marquis's cavalier swatting when wrongly perceived to be just another anonymous, brown bug.

We are no entomologist; we can't tell a rod away what brand an insect belongs to [...] but this varmint was brown, and it was easy to see that

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<sup>176</sup> Marquis, *Archy*, p. 4.

he was sad. He moved gingerly [...] like a lame pup; we could not see his face; his head hung down dejectedly. Evidently he was an insect who had just suffered some discouraging experience. This, no doubt, should have moved us to pity. But when the mania for swatting grips a man he forgets pity. We rushed forward and swatted.

\* \* \*

He died, and as he was dying we recognised him.<sup>177</sup>

Killing is unproblematic in Marquis and Marsh if the victim is a 'varmint' or, as the Victorian entomologists and Lessingham would term it, a 'noxious insect'. That Archy suffers this fate poses an ethical dilemma for his readership, the majority of whom will have fondly ascribed personhood to a textual bug pest yet would have no qualms in squashing a live cockroach.

To Archy, the virtually indestructible bug who keeps failing to commit suicide, permanent death would be a relief, but death proves a brief and transitory state when time and again he transmigrates into a cockroach with rational thoughts. Archy's lament at his metempsychosis acquires a loud hymnal quality on the brief occasion the typewriter's shift key gets stuck in capitals:

AH FOR A SOUL LIKE MINE TO DWELL  
WITHIN A COCKROACH THAT IS HELL <sup>178</sup>

He understands his ugly insect state to be a punishment he must deserve and from which it transpires he cannot escape, attributing moral blame to being a bug as does Corelli's *Electric Creed*. Because Archy's world view detects degrees of moral worthiness within the same insect species, and because he identifies unworthiness in warmongering politicians with insect souls, his position is complex.

i  
am taking my meals with  
the specimens in the  
smithsonian institution when i  
see any one coming i hold  
my breath and look like another

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<sup>177</sup> Marquis, *Archy* p. 23.

<sup>178</sup> Marquis, *Archy*, p. 17.

specimen but in the  
 capitol building there  
 is no attention paid to me  
 because there are so  
 many other insects  
 around <sup>179</sup>

To conceal himself, he mimics the pinned-down, dead bugs at the Washington museum, which affords him an entry for criticising the entomologists' killing bottles analogous to Atherton's 'magic vapour'.

i thought what is sport to  
 you old fellow is  
 death to us insects morality  
 is all in the point  
 of view if the cockroaches  
 should start killing the  
 humans just to study them there  
 would a howl go up [...] even germans  
 are not gassed for study <sup>180</sup>

Archy functions as a moral compass, and not just to one reluctant, wooden-headed marionette as does Pinocchio's talking cricket.<sup>181</sup> In his comic appeal, green agenda, pacifism, and cross-species egalitarianism, Archy arouses the social conscience of a nation. Through access to the typewritten word, he campaigns for those who are trodden underfoot by a powerfully unforgiving system. His insect species enables him to speak 'truly from the margins', as Jay Mechling observes in 'From archy to Archy: Why Cockroaches are Good to Think', and Marion Copeland echoes in 'Voices of the

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<sup>179</sup> Marquis, *Archy*, p. 88.

<sup>180</sup> Marquis, *Archy*, p.98. Gas was weaponised in WW1, but Marquis could not anticipate the WWII gas chambers used by the Nazis to exterminate a Jewish people dehumanised as 'parasitic vermin' and experimented upon. On this poignant subject, see for example Hollingsworth and Livingstone Smith. Regrettably there is not scope in this thesis to do it justice.

<sup>181</sup> Collodi's original Pinocchio, angry at being admonished by the talking cricket, smashes it against the wall, Carlo Collodi, *Story of a Puppet or The Adventures of Pinocchio*, trans. by M. A Murray (London: R. Fischer Unwin, 1892).

Least Loved'.<sup>182</sup> To be a cockroach is to be a victim and a survivor, alienated by most, and because of this treatment, enlightened to the similar plight of other Others.

Archy is free verse poet and scavenging saviour, herald of a new era to supersede the Anthropocene.

i shall  
eat everything  
all the world shall come at  
last to the multitudinous maws  
of insects  
a civilisation perishes  
before the tireless teeth of little germs  
ha ha i have thrown off the mask  
at last  
you thought I was only  
an archy  
but I am more than that  
i am anarchy<sup>183</sup>

Archy undermines authority figures and structures of power, challenging the powerful, political centre as does Marsh's Beetle in her occupation of London, aggressive pursuit of statesman Lessingham, and reproachful dehumanised embodiment. When aroused to anger by injustice, Archy's anarchy sympathises with subalternity.

Plotting the trajectory of insect imagery in the wake of Marsh's novel is a feat of filtration when inundated by examples in fiction, film, photography, drama and even ballet. Inevitably this thesis can only give space to a salient few. In-between the filmic adaptation of *The Beetle* and the three plays, and contemporaneously with Archy, came Karel and Josef Čapek's *The Insect Play*, first performed in Brno in 1922,

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<sup>182</sup> Jay Mechling, 'From archy to Archy: Why Cockroaches are Good to Think', *Southern Folklore*, 48 (1992), 163; Marion W. Copeland, 'Voices of the Least Loved: The Cockroach in the Contemporary American Novel', in *Insect Poetics*, ed. by Brown, pp. 153-75.

<sup>183</sup> Quoted in Mechling, 641.

and premiering at the Regent Theatre, London in 1923.<sup>184</sup> *The Insect Play* is a satire on interwar Czech society set within the frame narrative of a drunken tramp who falls asleep and dreams of talking insects, listens to their conversations and communicates with them. Within the play, in fabular fashion, a variety of insect species are stereotyped to exemplify human foibles. Central to the second Act is a pair of dung beetles to whom a ball of dung is a treasure more important than children or home and symbolises the obsessive accumulation of capital to the exclusion of all other considerations. Casting these creatures as the embodiment of acquisitiveness recalls Acheta Domestica's description of the Scarabaeus as 'an amasser of filth, fit emblem of Mammon worship'.<sup>185</sup> The analogy is nevertheless something of an outlier in insect imagery and is turned on its head in a re-imagining of the Čapeks's play by fellow Czech, Jan Švankmajer.

Surrealist Švankmajer uses Starevich's combination of stop motion animation and insects. Švankmajer's first film, *The Last Trick*, maintains the leitmotif of a big black beetle throughout.<sup>186</sup> It crawls up the nose of a large papier-mâché head to investigate the inner workings of the human brain where it interacts with violin music as notes on the page and as strings of the instrument. It is worth remembering that insectile Gregor Samsa's appreciation of his sister's violin playing may be cited either as evidence of retained humanity or animal instinct. The final shot of *The Last Trick* is an extreme close-up of the beetle lying motionless on its back after a duo of warring musicians have dismembered each other's bodies. The insect has apparently been a disinterested observer, invading the sanctity of the human seat of reason but lacking understanding of its surroundings. Yet the beetle's supposed detachment is called

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<sup>184</sup> Karel Čapek and Josef Čapek, *The Insect Play (Ze Zivota Hymzu)* (1921). Although Kafka and the Čapeks were close in age and spent overlapping time in Prague, they wrote in different languages and moved in different religious circles.

<sup>185</sup> Acheta Domestica, *Episodes of Insect Life* (1851), p. 125. See also Figure 0:1.

<sup>186</sup> *The Last Trick*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (1964), online recording <<http://www.tresbohemes.com/2017/11/last-trick-czech-filmmaker-jan-svankmajer/>> [accessed 30 July 2021].

into question when its death coincides with the mutual destruction of the caricature humans. Even in seeming obliviousness, its participation in the fate of the men who have artificial heads and emotionless faces hints at inter-connectedness.

Švankmajer's last film, the meta-cinematic *Insects* shows a group of amateur actors rehearsing *The Insect Play* for which they are dressed in tokenistic outfits to indicate their bug species.<sup>187</sup> Alongside costumic nods to entomology, Švankmajer inserts shots of real insects skewered in display cases and footage of live insects crawling freely around and massing alarmingly on windowpanes. Within the film, the director of the play instructs his amateur players to 'leave your emotions out of it if you can', presumably to enhance their portrayal of insect impassivity. Švankmajer, director of the film itself, forestalls his cinema audience feeling too much emotional identification with onscreen characters through his witty exploitation of comedy horror. He invites laughter and disgust to disrupt the narrative, and intentionally compromises his film's fragile illusion by his repeated on-set invasions in which he philosophises, muses on his production, and reveals the mechanism of his special effects leaving no space for suspension of disbelief. The result is a stimulation not of the hearts of those who are watching, but of their minds. His is not a request for empathy: it is a demand for sympathy. Starevich used *The Cameraman's Revenge* to show insects as humans: Švankmajer exposes humans as insects. He elaborates on it in his speech recorded at the Tate Modern premiere.

The Čapek brothers' play, *The Insect Play* is a misanthropic play. My screenplay only extends this misanthropy, as man is more like an insect and this civilisation is more like an anthill. One should also remember the message behind Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> *Insects*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (CinemArt, 2018). I was present at the film premiere at the Tate Modern on 18 May 2018, an event attended by Švankmajer himself, who spoke about his work and asserted *Insects* would be his final film.

<sup>188</sup> Jan Švankmajer, 'Insects', *Tate* <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/film/jan-svankmajer-insects> [accessed 17 August 2021].

The implication is that message concerns systemic ruthlessness, dehumanising oppression, and the requirement for sympathy for the subaltern bug.

Initially, Švankmajer represents insect characteristics through minimal costuming, for example by deely boppers worn on the head to suggest antennae or painted sunglasses to stand in for compound eyes. As the film progresses, the men and women increasingly become physically and behaviourally blended with the species they portray. The inept man playing the dung beetle carries a rucksack to evince the insect's convex back; a leather motorbike helmet conceals his hair and goggles hide his human eyes. By the time he has a fight in the disgustingly insanitary toilet and escapes with the aid of a huge ball of excrement, it is clear he is not just dressed as a dung beetle, effectively he has become one. Figure V:8 shows the boundary between the human and entomological breached. Relentless rolling of the ball of dung does not on this occasion imply a beetle overburdened with wealth, but one that has fallen victim to capitalism's exploitation of the proletariat. The little everyman is drilled into servitude with others of his kind and is now all but indistinguishable from them. The scarab is once again a subaltern.



Figure V:8

Jan Švankmajer *Insects* (2018)

Film Stills: Courtesy Athanor



In terms of divergent evolution from Marsh's original text, works by Kafka, Marquis, the Čapeks and Švankmajer embody key aspects of *The Beetle*, and one of its most significant afterlives occurs in the weird Bas-Lag universe of China Miéville, described by its author as 'basically a secondary world fantasy with Victorian era technology'.<sup>189</sup> In this steampunk setting exists a racially constructed hybrid species known as khepris: beetle beings whose nomenclature references the Egyptian god.<sup>190</sup> Khepri physiology is marked by extreme sexual differentiation. Female khepris are artistic, intelligent bipeds with the body of a woman and the head of a scarab. Male khepris are lobster-sized beetles, mere 'mindless scuttlers' with no capacity for reason.<sup>191</sup> Miéville pushes beetle binarism to the utmost.

The diaspora of the khepris has caused them to establish new communities far from their homeland, and in *Perdido Street Station*, the first of Miéville's Bas-Lag series, they inhabit the ghettos of New Crobuzon, subject to what Carl Freedman describes as 'quasi ethnic or quasi-racial bigotry'.<sup>192</sup> Miéville describes his supercity in an interview with Joan Gordon.

New Crobuzon is clearly analogous to a chaos-fucked Victorian London. But it's more than just the geography [...] and the industry [...] It's the way the city intersects with the literature that chronicles it. [...] Though New Crobuzon contains other cities — Cairo in particular — it's London at heart.<sup>193</sup>

To approach New Crobuzon is to read it as a late nineteenth-century Egyptianised London, a palimpsest already written upon by Marsh. Gordon perceives Miéville to be

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<sup>189</sup> Richard Marshall, 'The Road to Perdido: An Interview with China Miéville', *3AM Magazine* (February 2003)  
<[http://www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/2003/feb/interview\\_china\\_mieville.html](http://www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/2003/feb/interview_china_mieville.html)> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>190</sup> Miéville does not capitalise the khepri race.

<sup>191</sup> China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* (London: Pan Books, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>192</sup> Carl Freedman, *Art and Idea in the Novels of China Miéville* (Canterbury: Gylphi Limited, 2015), p. 29.

<sup>193</sup> Joan Gordon and China Miéville, 'Reveling in Genre: An Interview with China Miéville', *Science Fiction Studies*, 30.3 (November 2003), 355-73 (p. 362).

'literalising the metaphor [of hybridity] in its fantastically chimeric people and in its fantastically accreted city.'<sup>194</sup> Wolfreys sees Marsh's city and its monster as hieroglyphs. Gordon sees Miéville's city and its monsters as hybrids. David Pike sees an 'abcity' in which monsters are 'abcanny' dwellers.<sup>195</sup> His phraseology draws on theoretical concepts expressed by Miéville himself in 'On Monsters', where he contrasts the uncanny nineteenth century with the abcanniness of the 'Weird', expressly relating it to 'abnormal' rather than 'abject'.<sup>196</sup> He views the Weird as 'an offhandedly predatory unkennable, a bad numinous, manifesting often at a much closer scale, right up tentacular in your face, and casually apocalyptic'.<sup>197</sup> In 'Quantum Vampire', Miéville considers the 'constituent bodyparts' of weird teratological creatures and finds them to be 'disproportionately insectile/cephalopodic [but] without mythic resonance'.<sup>198</sup> On that basis, Marsh's monstrous and mysterious Beetle and Miéville's khepri race may be insectile, but, being strong in mythic resonance, would not be considered 'weird', even though the Beetle slots into many of Miéville's monstrous categories: abcanny, uncanny, recanny (happening again), katacanny (from the earth below) and surcanny (from the sky above).<sup>199</sup>

New Crobuzon's population is comprised of multiple 'in your face' monsters, writ large. They are composite creatures, some having naturally stabilised into named species such as the khepri, and some having been artificially constructed or 'remade'.<sup>200</sup> A central character in *Perdido Street Station* is Lin, a female khepri who is sexually active with more than one partner, though not promiscuous. To procreate she must mate her beetle headbody with a khepri male. For an emotionally satisfying

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<sup>194</sup> Joan Gordon, 'Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 30.3 (2003), 456-76 (p. 457).

<sup>195</sup> David L. Pike, 'China Miéville's Fantastic Slums and the Urban Abcanny', *Science Fiction Studies*, 46.2 (July 2019), 250-66.

<sup>196</sup> China Miéville, 'On Monsters: Or, Nine or More (Monstrous) Not Cannies', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 23.3 (2012), 377-92.

<sup>197</sup> Miéville, 'On Monsters', 381.

<sup>198</sup> China Miéville, 'M. R. James and the Quantum Vampire', *Collapse*, 4 (2008), 105-28 (p. 105).

<sup>199</sup> Miéville, 'On Monsters'.

<sup>200</sup> See Gordon, 'Hybridity'.

relationship, she takes Isaac as a human lover. Their bond is delineated in sharp contrast to the degraded and commercialised cross-species copulation in which human youths exploit khepri females for illicit sexual tourism.<sup>201</sup> The parallel with Lessingham in the backstreets of Cairo is marked.

Lin enjoys with her man a consummation devoutly wished for by the Beetle, but even though Lin and Isaac's intercourse is love-making, Miéville does not shy away from both participants perceiving it as perversion.<sup>202</sup>

It was when she ate that Lin was most alien, and their shared meals were a challenge and an affirmation. As he watched her, Isaac felt the familiar thrill of emotion, disgust immediately stamped out, pride at the stamping out, guilty desire. [...] He watched the huge iridescent scarab that was his lover's head devour her breakfast.<sup>203</sup>

Lin is both beautiful and grotesque, veering between both ends of the attraction repulsion spectrum. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr captures this essence in 'On the Grotesque in Science Fiction'. He describes 'a projection of fascinated repulsion/attraction out into objects that consciousness cannot accommodate, because the object disturbs the sense of rational, natural categorisation'.<sup>204</sup> Lin disturbs the natural order of things for Isaac and the reader, who participate in a cycle of emotional turmoil in which antipathy and sympathy are constantly overturning one another. In Isaac's loving eyes, Lin is a monster. In Lin's khepri eyes it is Isaac and not she who is the abnormal form. She calls him '*My Monster*'.<sup>205</sup> Her application of the derogatory term is used in conjunction with the possessive and reveals teasing affection for him rather than condemnation. It is nevertheless a decentralising of the

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<sup>201</sup> Freedman, pp. 26-28.

<sup>202</sup> Atherton paraphrases this expression from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in his discussion with the Beetle. *Marsh, Beetle*, p. 109.

<sup>203</sup> Miéville, *Perdido*, p. 13.

<sup>204</sup> Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, 'On the Grotesque in Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies* (March 2002), 71-99 (p. 72).

<sup>205</sup> Miéville, *Perdido*, p. 13.

human race, reduced to alternate species status as beings with '*khepri bodies, legs, hands, and the heads of shaved gibbons*'.<sup>206</sup>

Lin's words and thoughts on the printed page are italicised because they are not vocalised. She conveys meaning to humans through undulating her headbody's six legs in sign language. She communicates with insects through the emission of chemicals interpretable by antennae. Hers is a face that is unreadable in the human sense, however she is still capable of displaying intimacy which she does by opening up her hard shell and exposing the fragility of her 'beautiful, useless little beetle wings [...] totally vulnerable, an expression of trust and love unparalleled for the khepri'.<sup>207</sup> Those delicate underwings cannot get female khepris airborne because their humanoid body weighs them down. Unlike Marsh's Beetle, Miéville's Lin is gifted with neither flight nor psychic manipulation. *Perdido Street Station* presents a scale of insectile otherness on which female khepris occupy a position not far removed from humans. In stark contrast are the slake-moths, illegally imported for their powerful mind-altering properties and commoditised as a narcotic. When criminal negligence enables them to escape containment, what was once larval prey has matured into imago predator sucking out the sentience of the urbanites. The slake-moths' dimension-hopping alienness has the effect of normalising the scarab-headed female. The process is reinforced meta-textually by descriptions of Lin which are, as Gordon observes, 'without adjectival recoil'.<sup>208</sup>

Lin is alien, but because she is not too alien, she is accessible. She has a name and personhood. She is individuated. She even defies what Freedman calls 'the clannishness and essentialistic identity-politics that, as we learn in quasi-ethnographic fashion, dominate khepri culture'.<sup>209</sup> Her insect perspective is present both in the glimpses of her inner thoughts and in her translated impressions which take concrete

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<sup>206</sup> Miéville, *Perdido*, p. 13.

<sup>207</sup> Miéville, *Perdido*, p. 18.

<sup>208</sup> Gordon, 'Hybridity', 459.

<sup>209</sup> Freedman, p. 22.

form in objects of aesthetic value. Kaleidoscopic sculptures made from her own shaped and hardened coleopterous secretions reveal the world as the scarab sees it through compound eyes.

Lin's bulging mirrored eyes saw the city in a compound visual cacophony. A million tiny sections of the whole, each miniscule hexagon segment ablaze with sharp colour, and even sharper lines, super-sensitive to differentials of light, weak on details unless she focused hard enough to hurt slightly [...] *I see clearly as you, clearer. [...] You must process as one picture. What chaos! [...] For me each tiny part has integrity, each fractionally different from the next, until all variation is accounted for, incrementally, rationally.*<sup>210</sup>

Lin offers a simulacrum of insect vision and consciousness that proves no bar to emotional engagement with her 'monstrosity'. Miéville goes some way to explaining it in his 'Theses on Monsters'.<sup>211</sup> 'Our sympathy for the monster is notorious [...] It is a trace of skepticism that the given order is a desideratum that lies behind our tears for its antagonists, our troubled empathy'.<sup>212</sup> Švankmajer's beetle-man reinforces the link between insect imagery and Gramscian subalternity and is pitiable. Ghettoised khepri, Lin unsettles speciesism and is admirable. Marsh's Beetle, the colonised subject out for revenge is largely horrible.

In this chapter I took a step away from Marsh's novel to contemplate the afterlives of *The Beetle* in one film and three plays and discovered those adaptations denying sympathy for the insect even more than does the source text. Technologically adept posing of dead insects by Starevich proved to have very little to do with the natural creatures and to say more about the manipulation of anthropoid puppets to expose human foibles. The performances of living insects on Percy Smith's large-screen documentaries tend to inspire awe rather than pity, and even though that reaction is a positive one, it is not the same as sympathy. Neither any of the films

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<sup>210</sup> Miéville, *Perdido*, p. 20.

<sup>211</sup> China Miéville, 'Theses on Monsters', *Conjunctions*, 59 (Colloquy 2012), 142-44.

<sup>212</sup> Miéville, 'Theses on Monsters', 143.

discussed nor dramatic adaptations of *The Beetle* are locations of the sympathetic insect

What emerged in my third section is that imaginative granting of access to the interiority of the insect offered by Kafka, Marquis and Miéville is key to locating sympathy for them. In *Perdido Street Station*, sex and species are essential to Lin's creative endeavour. For her artistic and pensive communications to be comprehensible, it is necessary for her to be more than a mindless, male, scarab. She must also possess reason. Therein lies the conundrum for all the authors, dramatists and film makers whose bugs are enmeshed with the human as shapeshifters or hybrids or pseudo-people. Animal Studies scholars, John Simons, Philip Armstrong, and Susan McHugh argue that closer identification and sympathetic alignment with the nonhuman is guided by stronger 'tracks' or 'traces of species'; 'the markings of different orders of agency' left by the living animal behind the imagery.<sup>213</sup> There are few 'traces' in Marsh, but careful investigation reveals they are not altogether absent. In a single supernatural entity is an Egyptian woman with a rich mythological and colonial history and there is also a scarab with an insect nature. Re-biologising the Gothicised Beetle has helped rectify distortions in the imagery of what and whom the bug represents. Her text becomes just about possible as a location for a creature that is more same than other and my hypothesis the sympathetic insect can be pinned down in *The Beetle* is proven even if in a limited way. That it is discoverable at all in an apparently entomophobic text is surprising and encouraging.

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<sup>213</sup> John Simons, *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 5; Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 3; Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 6; David Herman, *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018).

## Conclusion

This thesis has adopted cultural entomology as its methodological principle and combined it with emotional affect to focus on one example of late nineteenth-century, popular fiction. It is a medium which might be dismissed as ephemeral, although the research journey from environmental concerns to Egyptian Gothic horror and back again has stark relevance for the twenty-first century. It has led me to conclude that the rhetoric of repugnance surrounding insects and their imagery chiefly stems from tribalism and anthropocentrism. Darwin recognised in *Descent of Man* that such prejudices are not in the interests of the greater good, and the way to combat them is to take a global and interspecies perspective. This expansion of the strategic bounds of sympathy is a consideration at the heart of Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) where she calls for a dismantling of human exceptionalism on the grounds of the inter-reliance of all living things and conceives of a network of ubiquitous, ever-extending lines where none exists in circumscribed spheres.<sup>1</sup> Haraway identifies 'all-too ordinary urgencies of onrushing multispecies extinctions, genocides, immiserations and exterminations', and calls for 'multispecies becoming-with', where all 'critters' are 'kin'.<sup>2</sup> In her model, insects are not other, but same. It is a sympathetic stance reflected in modes of storytelling about them.

I suggest burgeoning ecological awareness combined with plummeting insect numbers fundamentally alters the way of reading any insect in literature and indeed writing about them. At just over the halfway point between Marsh and Haraway looms Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a significant work for its exposure of the danger of indiscriminate pesticide usage: as if Atherton's magic vapour had killed the

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2016). Haraway's 'Chthulucene' is a geological epoch in which interspecies hierarchies are flattened. Its etymology derives from the arthropod species *Pimoida cthulhu* and not Lovecraft's 'monster male elder god', pp. 32-33, 174.

<sup>2</sup> Haraway, pp. 37, 2-3, 10-13.

insects and caused birdsong to cease.<sup>3</sup> Biology Professor and populist author, Dave Goulson echoes Carson's *Silent Spring* in his own *Silent Earth* (2021).<sup>4</sup> Goulson highlights an insect demise which has exponentially worsened in recent years, and he expresses an urgent need to diffuse positive entomological connotations in multiple arenas to avert an ecological disaster. A Gothic novel such as *The Beetle* plays a positive part in that Marsh proves prescient in hinting a chemical scientist with governmental approval and financial backing poses a far worse threat to the world than any malignant or maligned scarab. Atherton with his invention of an insecticide-derived weapon of mass destruction can be read as a character who is environmentally antipathetic, even apocalyptically so. In *Dark Ecology*, Timothy Morton views humans, not insects, as the noxious pests, and he presents the Anthropocene as 'Nature in its toxic nightmare form'.<sup>5</sup>

Morton argues as does this thesis: 'some concepts that live at the level of horror can be toxic for ecological awareness'.<sup>6</sup> The Gothicised Egyptian Beetle, unless benefitting from a postcolonial, reparative reading or a biologically informed re-interpretation, may be one such toxic horror. Care must be taken for it not to bequeath a legacy of: racism, misogyny, murder, genocide, or contributing to species extinctions. Foundational ecocritic and Pulitzer Prize nominee, Joseph Meeker asks the uncomfortable question: 'from the unforgiving perspective of evolution and natural selection, does literature contribute more to our survival than it does to our extinction?'<sup>7</sup> Literature in the form of a big bug bestseller may inadvertently have exercised, and continue to exercise, a deleterious effect on people, creatures, and the global ecosystem. This thesis with its flavour of "consilience", the coming together of

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<sup>3</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1962). See also Glen A. Love, 'Ecocriticism and Science: Towards Consilience?', *New Literary History*, 30.3 (1999), 561-76 (p. 563-65).

<sup>4</sup> Dave Goulson, *Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia UP, 2016), p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Morton, p. 236.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Schribner, 1974), p. 4. Cited in Love. 'Ecocriticism and Science', 564, and Willis, *Literature and Science*, p.139.



knowledge housed in science and in the humanities, has made strenuous efforts to crack the carapace of Marsh's coleopterous monster, but it has become evident very little of the innocent insect breaks through, and this could be harmful to all.<sup>8</sup>

Philosopher, Peter Singer's consideration of "speciesism" uses the term, in his own words, 'deliberately, to make a parallel with other "isms" that we are familiar with, particularly racism and sexism'.<sup>9</sup> My thesis' contention has been that these "isms" are intertwined and that the Beetle is a victim of all three. My first chapter drew on Marsh's mixed ethnicity, former prisoner status, and mimicry of alternative personae, and found those biographical elements to be incorporated into aspects of the Beetle. I discussed how sympathetic affect is authorially manipulated, historically, geographically, biologically, and culturally determined, and how, being potentially governed by unconscious imperialist bias, the novel's genre and narrative structure is antagonistic to the shapeshifter. However, I also demonstrated how an apologetic, postcolonial reader might interpret the monstrous, subaltern scarab as not wholly a villain, but partly a victim. Heightened awareness of subtextual, Orientalised commentary led me to further investigate the significance of the Beetle's Egyptian origin.

My second chapter considered the Beetle in the context of her native ancient Egyptian mythology, and it drew on sympathetic elements present in Isis and Khepri relating to rebirth and salvation. I explained how the small number of other-regarding medical interventions carried out by the Beetle result in beneficial outcomes for others, and how they constitute rare examples of the insectile character dispensing sympathy, regardless of whether her good deeds spring from altruistic concern, calculated self-interest, or instinctive survivalism. Comparison of *The Beetle* with late nineteenth-century Egyptian Gothic showed the scarab to be a popular motif and I

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<sup>8</sup> See Love, especially 568. See also John Holmes, 'Consilience Rebalanced: Edward O. Wilson on Science, the Humanities and the Meaning of Human Existence', *Journal of Literature and Science*, 10.1 (2017), 5-10.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Singer, 'Speciesism and Moral Status', *Metaphilosophy*, 40.3 (July 2009), 567-81 (p. 572).

pointed to the Beetle posing a lesser threat than strategically brilliant Ayesha and Tera, who respectively scheme to usurp Queen Victoria's sovereignty, or Pharos, who employs biological warfare to riddle his western enemies with disease. The Beetle's vengeful aspirations are more limited, but I assessed her behaviour as being, not equivalent to sympathy, only antipathy more narrowly focused.

My third chapter interrogated the oft-repeated assertion the Beetle is gender fluid. I made the counter claim that, while this may be true for perceived and performed gender, her sex is fixed and female no matter if manifesting as a woman or a bug. Female sex not only deepens the shadow of subalternity as shown in the opening chapter, but magnifies monstrous alterity, increases perceived threat, and influences others' assessment of her as ugly, criminally wicked, and evil, negative assumptions I was largely successful in dismantling. I suggested that to be female places the Beetle's younger self at risk of colonial exploitation and prey to romantic obsession, and that out of those considerations arise grounds for retrospective sympathy, an emotion she evidently feels for herself.

My fourth chapter presented the Beetle operating in real-and-imagined London, an imperial metropolis embedded in Egyptian culture and populated by aesthetically pleasing beetles. The discussion on insect aesthetics in clothing and jewellery exposed the illogicality of fashionable Londoners sporting beetle images or beetle wings while shuddering at a fictional character manifesting as a beetle. In this environment, Marsh's insect was revealed to have an affinity with the material objects of the city and the streets over which she has panoptic vision, and she appeared at her most sympathetic. In contrast, her spatial situatedness as an over-large foreigner exerting territorial control over the metropolitan heart reinforced the distancing affect of the conceptual spheres of sympathy and caused the Beetle to remain Other.

My fifth chapter considered the afterlives of the Beetle. These continue to proliferate, and I shall add just a few to this conclusion. The modern-day *Micrographia* of photographer Levon Biss celebrates insect beauty. He was first inspired by an ordinary ground beetle which he viewed under a microscope when the creature's

markings revealed themselves to duplicate the vast array of stars, planets, and satellites.<sup>10</sup> Biss's wonderment at the cosmic sympathy of an insignificant bug epitomises Foucault's description of 'aemulatio' in *The Order of Things*: 'whereby things scattered throughout the universe answer one another' in a similitude or 'natural twinship'.<sup>11</sup> Discovering magnitude in miniature, and using his technical and creative expertise to overcome the limited depth of field ordinarily experienced with intense magnification of a tiny subject, Biss began photographing individual insects in astonishingly intricate detail. The outcome was a series of beautifully lit, huge images. So respected was his work, he was invited by Oxford University Museum of Natural History to photograph items from their collection, the most notable of which was a shield beetle brought back from Australia in 1836 by Charles Darwin. The resulting Microsculpture exhibition with its incidental pedagogic element stimulated a fascinated response from viewers owing far more to aesthetic appreciation than to horror or loathing.<sup>12</sup> In Marsh's *The Beetle* it is only the pesticidal vivisectionist who appreciates sympathetic beauty in the oversized scarab, however it is telling the author opted to incorporate this view when he could so easily have omitted it at no sacrifice to his plot.

David Huckvale assesses Marsh's legacy to filmic scarabs bequeathing not beauty, but the horror exemplified in 'specific connections' between *The Beetle* and Stephen Sommers's 1999 remake of *The Mummy*.

One of the recurring 'horrors' in *The Beetle* is the sensation experienced by several characters of feeling a beetle crawling under their bedsheets, creeping over their limbs and touching their faces. Sommers' film includes similar physical horror when showing the audience several occasions when scarab beetles literally get under the

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<sup>10</sup> Levon Biss, 'Mind Blowing Magnified Portraits of Insects'. *Ted Talk* (April 2017), <[https://www.ted.com/talks/levon\\_biss\\_mind\\_blowing\\_magnified\\_portraits\\_of\\_insects?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/levon_biss_mind_blowing_magnified_portraits_of_insects?language=en)> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Levon Biss, 'Microsculpture Exhibition' (May -December 2016) <<http://microsculpture.net/exhibition.html>> [Accessed 08 July 2021].

skin of more than one character and working their way up to their unfortunate victims' brains.<sup>13</sup>

It is a trope revisited in Ned Beaman's *Boxer Beetle* (2010), the prize-winning novel in which beetles eat their victim from the innards outwards.<sup>14</sup> Jewish, alcoholic former boxer, Seth 'Sinner' Roach is determined to demonstrate supremacy over the fascist scientist claiming rights over his body. He deliberately introduces into his mouth the last two surviving specimens of the swastika-marked *Anophthalmus hitleri*, artificially bred for extreme aggression. Roach the subaltern is silenced and the insects are the colonising force. His failed attempt to bite through their carapaces and obliterate the new beetle species allows them to burrow down deep inside where they possess him, consume him, and transform him into their coleopteran brood chamber.

He groped desperately at his neck, and then he gagged hard as he felt them scratching at his tonsils like transubstantiated whooping cough. He staggered forward and leaned against the wall, trying to pump them out like a gob of phlegm, but they were much too big, and they were already moving further down into his windpipe, deeper into the dark wet warmth of him. Even half-chewed, even crippled, they carried on — that was how Erskine had bred them. He tried to make himself vomit but he couldn't, and he tried to shout for Mrs. Minton, but he couldn't. In fact, the only sound he could make was a wet chitinous clicking, as if the beetles themselves were talking out of his mouth, little skittering blurs appeared before his eyes, and they reminded him of beetles too.<sup>15</sup>

*Anophthalmus hitleri* are a fictitious species of carrion beetle of the *Silphidae* family, which normally feed on decaying matter such as dead rodents. Beside them Marsh's scarab looks positively mild, but in their natural state even *Silphidae* have much to recommend them such as parental care of their young. It is how Beaman and the

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<sup>13</sup> David Huckvale, *Ancient Egypt in the Popular Imagination* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), p. 161; *The Mummy*, dir. by Stephen Sommers (Universal Pictures, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Ned Beaman, *Boxer Beetle* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Beaman, p. 219.

crazed scientist within the text manipulate them that makes for an unpleasant but powerful book.

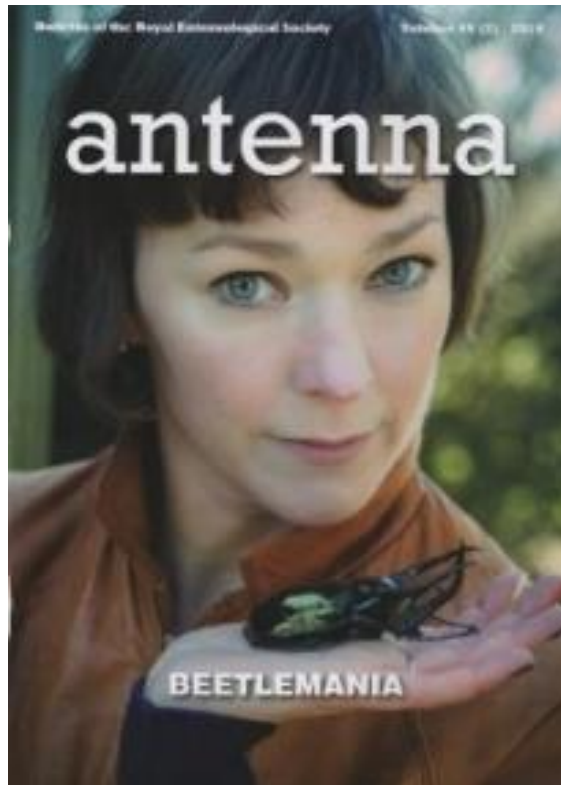


Figure VI:1

Front cover, 'Beetlemania'  
featuring M. G. Leonard

*Antenna: Bulletin of the Royal  
Entomological Society* 40.2  
(Spring 2016)

In contrast to Beauman, M. G. Leonard's *Beetle Boy* trilogy (2016-2018) directs the perception of insects away from terrifying villainy towards mutual sympathy with humans.<sup>16</sup> Although they are not strictly speaking fantasy novels, her texts are in the tradition of Sarah Coleridge's *Phantasmion* and Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* in being targeted at children.<sup>17</sup> Unlike those authors, Leonard does not manipulate the human insect ratio or indulge in magical metamorphoses. She simply chooses a naturally large rhinoceros beetle to be her protagonist's friend. So much is Leonard credited with overcoming her own ignorance-fueled entomophobia to acquaint herself with the habits of beetles, that the Royal Entomological Society

<sup>16</sup> M. G. Leonard, *Beetle Boy* (Frome: Chicken House, 2016); *Beetle Queen* (Frome: Chicken House, 2017); *Battle of the Beetles* (Frome: Chicken House 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Roald Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach* (London: Alfred A Knopf Inc, 1961).

praised her for creating ‘a narrative in which insects are the lovable good guys and the reader incidentally learns about invertebrates’.<sup>18</sup> In 2016, she became the ‘Coleopteran cover girl’ for the Society’s magazine, *Antenna*, and the photograph of Leonard holding a giant beetle with the strapline ‘Beetlemania’ is shown in Figure VI:1.<sup>19</sup>

My scrutiny of one beetle in one book invites the application of cultural entomology to other fictional insects. George Langelaan’s *The Fly* (1957) envisages the accidental creation of an oversized man-insect hybrid.<sup>20</sup> John Fowles’s *The Collector* (1964) contains mirror narratives of a female lepidopteran captive and unhinged amateur entomologist. Frank Herbert’s *The Green Brain* (1966) is an entomological superorganism, and his *Hellstrom’s Hive* (1973) concerns militaristic formic hominoids. Clifford Simak’s *City* (1988) includes a future scenario of technologically advanced, uplifted ants with their own religion. Bernard Werber’s *Empire of the Ants* trilogy (1991-1996) delves into the interiority of ant psychology, society, and temperature-controlled temporality.<sup>21</sup> Daniel Evan Weiss’s *The Roaches have No King* (1994) displays the narratological skills of Numbers the cockroach, who orchestrates the continuation of his species’ mass co-habitation in the domestic space. Brian Aldiss’s *HARM* (2007) predicts humankind’s invasive colonisation of an insect planet. E. O. Wilson’s *Anthill* (2010) shows humankind as ecological predator on earth. Laline Paull’s *The Bees* (2017) immerses the reader in an apian perspective on navigation, reproduction, hierarchical society, on man’s parasitic beekeeping and

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<sup>18</sup> Royal Entomological Society, Ento -16. <<https://www.mgleonard.com/events/2016/9/8/ento16>> [accessed 08 July 2021].

<sup>19</sup> M. G. Leonard, ‘Coleopteran Cover Girl’, <<https://www.mgleonard.com/news/2016/6/11/coleopteran-cover-girl>> [accessed 08 July 2021]; ‘Front Cover’, *Antenna: Bulletin of the Royal Entomological Society* 40.2 (Spring 2016).

<sup>20</sup> George Langelaan, ‘The Fly’, *Playboy Magazine* (June 1957), pp. 16-68. Cronenberg’s film adaptation echoes Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. ‘I’m an insect who dreamt he was a man and loved it. But now the dream is over... and the insect is awake’. *The Fly*, dir. by David Cronenberg (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> Of Werber’s trilogy written in French, only *Empire of the Ant* has been translated into English, making this a greater challenge for a non-francophone critic

adverse environmental impact, all perceived through the eyes and antennae of Flora 717, an over-large, filthy, sanitation worker. My 2021 co-edited anthology of insect tales continues unpicking the entomological metaphor, but much exciting research remains to be done.<sup>22</sup>

Humans sympathise with fellow mammals. Less easily do they experience a similar concord with zoologically different creatures. The point is well made by National Geographic photographer, Joel Sartore. 'The mammals get all the press [...] but it's the insects that save us all.'<sup>23</sup> Katy Prudic sums up the associated ethical dilemma. 'Because they're built so differently, we tend to downplay their emotional states, probably because we don't see it in the same way we would with a dog or a cat or a cow'.<sup>24</sup> Even those who argue for animal rights such as Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson have made the misguided statement: 'I know dung beetles are insects, not animals', revealing either a deliberate mammalian exclusivity, or else writing in ignorance of the fact insects are members of the largest phylum in the animal kingdom.<sup>25</sup> In relation to Marsh, Glennis Byron also opposes the insect to the animal instead of incorporating insects within animals.<sup>26</sup> Such taxonomic inaccuracies are indicative of how writers conceptually make insects not just 'Humanity's Other', but even, as Charlotte Sleight notes, nonhuman animal's Other.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Daisy Butcher and Janette Leaf eds, *Crawling Horror: Creeping Tales of the Insect Weird* (British Library Publishing, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> Joel Sartore cited in Christine Dell-amore, 'Vanishing Insects', *National Geographic* (09 February 2021) <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/this-moth-was-finally-photographed-in-the-wild?cmpid=org=ngp::mc=social::src=twitter::cmp=editorial::add=tw20210209animals-dartmothphotoark11k::rid=&sf242789288=1>> [accessed 25 February 2021].

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Jason G. Goldman, 'I'll Bee There for You: Do Insects Feel Emotions?', *Scientific American* (30 September 2016) <<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/i-ll-bee-there-for-you-do-insects-feel-em>> [accessed 04 December 2020].

<sup>25</sup> Temple Grandin and Catherine Jonson, *Animals in Translation: The Woman Who Thinks Like a Cow* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2006), p. 59. Matthew Calarco finds this approach typical of Animal Studies, Matthew Calarco *Zoographies* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Glennis Byron makes the same mistake in 'Gothic in the 1890s', in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012), pp. 186-96 (p. 194).

<sup>27</sup> See Brown and Sleight, Chapter One, footnote 146.

In the scientific arena, research continues to be carried out into the instincts and emotions of insects. In 2016, Clint Perry conducted an experiment to test optimism bias in bumblebees, measuring their reactions to coloured flowers and sweetened water, cross-checking his results by administering drugs to some subjects to suppress chemicals associated with motivation and reward.<sup>28</sup> His findings reported in *Scientific American* and the *New York Times* demonstrate bees experience positive emotions similar to those that might be expected from vertebrates under similar conditions.<sup>29</sup> If insects by means of cognitive, chemical, and physiological make-up are capable of rudimentary emotion, there is some scientific justification for them meriting sympathy, which may seep into ways they are represented in various media and interpreted in those milieux.

Evolutionary biologist, David Anderson, is skeptical about theories of entomological emotion. He takes issue with Darwin:

he provided no consistent, operational criteria for identifying instances of emotional expression in such evolutionarily distant species, other than his own intuition — much of which was based on unabashed anthropomorphising. [...] We agree with Darwin that phylogenetically distant, invertebrate model organisms have primitive emotion states that are expressed by externally observable behaviors. However, in contrast to Darwin, we argue that, in such organisms, these primitive emotion states are not necessarily homologous to the specific psychological categories that define human emotions (fear, anger, happiness, and so forth).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Clint J. Perry, Luigi Baciadonna, Lars Chitka, 'Unexpected rewards induce dopamine-dependent positive emotion-like state changes in bumblebees', *Science*, 353.6307 (30 September 2016), 1,529-31.

<sup>29</sup> Goldman, 'I'll Bee There for You', *Scientific American* (30 September 2016); James Gorman, 'The Sweet Emotional Life of Bees' in *New York Times* (29 September 2016) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/science/bees-emotion-sugar.html>> [accessed 05 December 2020].

<sup>30</sup> David J. Anderson, 'A Framework for Studying Emotions Across Species', *Cell*, 157.1 (27 March 2014), 187–200 (p. 191).



Entomologist, Marlene Zuk agrees with Anderson: 'it is presumptuous, not to mention anthropomorphic, to claim they have humanlike feelings [...] we are on very shaky ground extrapolating our own feelings to beings so different from us'.<sup>31</sup> Even Perry is clear that, although his bees demonstrate positive emotions, he does not ascribe feelings of happiness to them, nor in his separate experiment on pessimism bias is he claiming they are sad. If an insect subject exhibits emotion states rather than experiencing true feelings, a 'sympathetic insect' cannot ever be an entomological entity in whom we entertain expectations of empathy. Instead, it is a creature calling out to be recognised as our fellow and for whom we should feel sympathy.

To assist in this endeavour, Morton proposes the adoption of ecognosis, a structuring of thought as nonhuman, which, he explains:

forces us to think and feel at multiple scales, scales that disorient normative concepts such as "present," "life," "human," "nature," "thing," "thought," and "logic", and perhaps also move away from human concepts of emotion. [...] in part ecognosis involves realising that nonhumans are installed at profound levels of the human — not just biologically and socially but in the very structure of thought and logic. Coexisting with these nonhumans is ecological thought, art, ethics, and politics.<sup>32</sup>

Within 'thought, art, ethics and politics', I subsume the verbal activities of writing and interpreting fiction. My thesis calls for an awareness of species interconnectedness when performing those tasks. Locating the sympathetic insect is worthwhile, particularly if it leads to environmentally beneficial actions. Indications are that readings of the Gothicised insect could be on the cusp of shifting closer to the natural creature. Dale Townshend's keynote speech at the international conference of *The Future of Gothic* (2021) predicted increasing numbers of critical approaches to the genre will incorporate ethical and environmental concerns.<sup>33</sup> My own paper on 'Does

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<sup>31</sup> Marlene Zuk, *Sex on Six Legs* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), pp. 70-72.

<sup>32</sup> Morton, pp. 158-59.

<sup>33</sup> Online, hosted by University of Macau in February 2021.

the Gothicised Insect Harm the Environment?’ was hailed as being at the vanguard of this movement and constituting ‘a new and very different way of reading Marsh’.<sup>34</sup> When cultural entomology embraces ecology it lends a greener tint to the monstrous metaphor of the Gothicised insect which in turn helps locate sympathy in *The Beetle* for the Beetle. I end my thesis by reiterating the assertion of Thomas Eisner, entomologist, ecologist, and friend of E. O. Wilson. ‘Bugs are not going to inherit the earth. They own it now. So we might as well make peace with the landlord.’<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dale Townshend’s keynote speech delivered at *The Future of the Gothic*, University of Macau online conference (25 February 2021); “Leaf’s paper is both detailed and acutely informed by theory. This is a new and very different way of reading Marsh #gothic #egypt # scarab” (@UMGothic, 25 February 2021).

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Eisner, cited in *Entomology and Pest Management*, ed. by Larry P. Pedigo and Marlin E. Rice (London: Prince-Hill, 2009), p. 601.

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