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Introduction: the most Gothic of acts – suicide in generic context

The literary Gothic, if not actually initiated with a fictional instance of suicide, is certainly prefaced by the avowed intention by one character to exercise the ultimate preference of death over life. Manfred, the Gothic hero of Horace Walpole's frequently playful but still guilt-ridden *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), having enjoyed his baronial fiefdom in the capacity of a usurper, arbitrarily divorced a faithful wife and contemplated a technically illegal and incestuous union with his prospective daughter-in-law, finally commits the – admittedly accidental – crime of filicide and dispatches his own child, believing her to be the same reluctant maiden who has justly spurned his advances. On learning of the magnitude of his crimes, his reaction is the *lex talionis* of the ancients: 'Life *shall* go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.'¹ The narrative recounts the fatal scene with breathless haste:

Ah me, I am slain! Cried Matilda, sinking: Good heaven, receive my soul – Savage, inhuman monster! what has thou done? Cried Theodore, rushing on [Manfred], and wrenching the dagger from him. – Stop, stop thy impious hand cried Matilda; it is my father! Manfred, waking as if from a trance, beat his breast, twisted his hands in his locks, and endeavoured to recover his dagger from Theodore to dispatch himself. Theodore, scarce less distracted, and only mastering the transports of his grief to assist Matilda, had now by his cries drawn some of the monks to his aid. While part of them endeavoured in concert with the afflicted Theodore to stop the blood of the dying princess, the rest prevented Manfred from laying violent hands on himself.²

Manfred's vain attempt to turn the fatal dagger on the very self that has abnegated all hope of familial continuation is surely the only gesture that may adequately and appropriately compensate for the severity of the tyrant's own actions. The usurper-prince, as the attendant friar, Father Jerome, cuttingly notes, has indeed 'shed [his] own blood' through the stabbing of Matilda (159). With no other lineal descendant – his son having been killed by supernatural intervention at the novel's inception – Manfred has, through the killing of Matilda, effectively terminated the endurance of both his familial descent and its claim to lordship.³ His subsequent fate – which, like his thwarted suicide, is an act undertaken explicitly by his own decision and hand – metaphorically ends his existence in the mortal world he has hitherto known and ruled. As the narrative laconically notes, on the morning following the death of Matilda, 'Manfred signed his abdication of the principality' and 'took the habit of religion' (165). His formal and irrevocable submission to monastic strictures ensures both his future celibacy and his withdrawal from society into an effective living death of rigorous silence, humble anonymity and regretful contemplation. His status, dynastically and communicatively, is that of one already dead. Even this living death may not constitute an adequate atonement for the crimes, which Manfred himself now freely confesses: 'what can atone for usurpation and a murdered child?' he queries, before concluding with the monitory statement 'may this bloody record be a warning to future tyrants!' (163). Though not visceral in its effect on his physical body, Manfred's withdrawal from the world has much the same effect as his suicide might have done. A self-consciously extreme action, it constitutes both a punishment for, and a release from, his crimes; it effectively removes him from social humanity but ensures his enduring presence there through the memory of his notoriety; uncanny in its implications, his social and dynastic self-annihilation imbricates both an apotheosis and a nemesis.

Suicide, as Manfred's analogous departure from the world may imply, is the most Gothic of acts. Its presence conditions death, profoundly reconfiguring the customary religious, moral and legal ramifications of the fleeting moment at which life is pronounced extinct, and thereby affecting the cultural value of both the individual who has taken their own life and the relationship of the deceased to their still-living associates. Suicide is, essentially, a momentary event with profound and lasting implications, a physical singularity that generates multiple social consequences, a point of crisis for the self and

for those who perceive that self. As the fate of Walpole's *Manfred* demonstrates, the implications of suicide may function even where the act is deferred or never actually completed. Indeed, the interruption of the suicide of Walpole's Prince of Otranto anticipates a similar moment in the life of the protagonist of Byron's *Manfred* (1816–17), the eponymous hero of this verse drama being a character somewhat more tempered by the humanism and sensibility of a later era. It is surely not a coincidence that Byron came to select the specific name of Manfred for the emotionally tormented protagonist of his verse drama. It is likewise significant that the Byronic hero, in common with his Walpolean Gothic-hero forebear, should see self-extinction as an appropriate solution to the problems of his mortal existence. In Gothic, arguably, suicide is not merely a significant act but a crucial one, engaging as it does the central existential motivations which mobilise the genre from Walpole's eighteenth century to the twenty-first-century present.

Suicide is an act which simultaneously encodes anticipation, realisation and rationalisation – and the Gothic provides a central corpus of enduring and provocative images by which the act and its implications of self-murder might be both communicated and interrogated within a nominally Christian culture that has, historically, condemned those who commit suicide to, at best, immediate or temporary ignominy within mortal culture and, at worst, the unending tortures of Hell. As a provocative and culturally rich event, suicide may function – in a manner somewhat similar to other Gothic pre-occupations such as incest, usurpation, violence, apostasy and death – in imbricating genre with non-fictional discourse, blurring the ostensible demarcation between the languages and conceptualities of figurative and literal existence. Suicide, in other words, is an act that – with its implications – may perhaps be most appropriately expressed in generically Gothic terms even outside the boundaries of imaginative or fictional writing.

The historical relationship between literary Gothic and the act of self-murder is graphically expressed in the manner in which Lord Byron appropriated generic imagery to provide a trenchant commentary on one of the most-celebrated suicides of his own era. Byron – a consumer as well as producer of Gothic textuality – responded to the death by suicide of the politician Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, on 12 August 1822 in his 'Preface to Cantos VI, VII and VIII' of *Don Juan*, published almost a year later in July 1823. As

a suicide under British law, Castlereagh's property would have been forfeited to the Crown and his body denied a burial in consecrated ground.⁴ The post-mortem imperilment of the statesman's body and chattels, however, was averted by way of a medico-legal inquest which, following statements from witnesses and a letter from the Duke of Wellington, ultimately concluded that Castlereagh's suicide was not the result of deliberate and conscious choice but a consequence of a temporary period of insanity.⁵

In the 'Preface to Cantos VI, VII and VIII' of *Don Juan*, Byron notes with particular distaste how Castlereagh's elevated station in life – he was the second Marquess of Londonderry as well as an elected English parliamentarian – and his political orthodoxy impacted on not merely the momentary reception of his private act of self-destruction but also the subsequent – and public – fate of both his body and his reputation. After suggesting that the politician was not only a divisive but also a *divided* figure – Castlereagh's 'amiable' private life being rhetorically contrasted with images of despotism, tyranny and weak intellect – Byron observed,

Of the manner of his death little need be said, except that if a poor radical, such as Waddington or Watson, had cut his throat, he would have been buried in a cross-road, with the usual appurtenances of the stake and mallet. But the minister was an elegant lunatic – a sentimental suicide – he merely cut the 'carotid artery' (blessings on their learning) and lo! the pageant, and the Abbey! and 'the syllables of dolour yelled forth' by the newspapers – and the harangue of the Coroner in a eulogy over the bleeding body of the deceased – (an Anthony worthy of such a Caesar) – and the nauseous and atrocious cant of a degraded crew of conspirators against all that is sincere and honourable.⁶

This is a rich passage, and one with implications that extend far beyond its allusions to the reputation of, and conspiracy against, another celebrated politician as depicted in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.⁷ 'Poor', in context, refers to the politically unfortunate as well as comparatively penurious position of the two emblematical radicals – these latter being figures for whom the suicidal statesman would doubtless have found little sympathy.⁸ Their projected fate – had the two indeed committed an act of self-destruction analogous to that of Castlereagh – would have utterly separated them from the sympathies as well as the presence of their fellow citizens.⁹ Byron's allusion to the prophylactic qualities of the stake and the mallet – a favoured means by which the unquiet souls of suicides might be deterred from nocturnal perambulation – not only draws on historical British jurisprudence

but also invokes the more recent Continental spectre of the vampire, popularised by lurid accounts translated for British journals from the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁰ That the word 'vampire' had gained a conventional and an accessible metaphorical function by 1765 indicates the potential for the un-dead to function as an image in political and social critique with equal felicity to its literary deployment as a locus of supernatural horror.¹¹

As a suicide – or, indeed, as a vampire, for the predatory un-dead are on occasions associated with the unquiet spirituality of those who have taken their own lives¹² – Castlereagh had forfeited the right to a Christian burial: the Anglican burial service is unequivocal that such spiritual comforts are denied to 'any that die unbaptised, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves'.¹³ As Byron testily notes, however, the hypocritical eulogies accorded to Castlereagh were to be succeeded by no less an event than his ceremonial interment in Westminster Abbey, the revered burial place of English kings, poets and statesmen. Clearly, there is something that Byron perceives as conditioning – and disarming – Castlereagh's act of self-murder, entitling him to both enduring honour and sacerdotal repose.

Despite the poet's opening remarks on the mode of Castlereagh's demise, it is neither wealth nor political orthodoxy that has ensured the politician's honourable interment. Instead, Byron implies, Castlereagh has been exonerated of deliberate complicity in his own death by way of the exercise of the professional disciplines of medicine and law. The poet's pointed emphasis on the 'learned' detail of the 'carotid artery' – this physiological point being a direct quotation from the coroner's formal report – rhetorically draws the politician's death away from religious or moral jurisdiction and relocates it within the curtilage of medico-jurism. The coroner, whose professional training positions him between medicine and law, has, nonetheless, an implicit function in the ecclesiastical governance. It is his professional and legally binding conclusion that Castlereagh took his own life while 'delirious and not of sound mind' that exonerates the politician from conscious agency in his own death and thereby facilitates his burial according to the rites of his professed faith.¹⁴

Byron is somewhat less indulgent than the coroner, however. He states, testily, of Castlereagh: 'In his death he [was] necessarily one of two things by the *law* – a felon or a madman – and in either case no great subject for panegyric'.¹⁵ This may be, strictly, true, but the poet's rhetoric continues in a vein such as might cast doubt on Castlereagh's

implied lack of conscious complicity in his own death. Byron returns to two of his more mystifying asides – that Castlereagh was both ‘an elegant lunatic’ and ‘a sentimental suicide’ – in his Preface, when he turns to how the panegyric of the day comprehended the politician as a specifically *Irish* figure.¹⁶ The poet suggests, later in his Preface, that a hypothetical Irish conscience might reasonably object to the statesman’s interment in Westminster Abbey for reasons other than mere sectarian prejudice. Byron intones,

Let us hear no more of this man; and let Ireland remove the ashes of her Grattan from the sanctuary of Westminster. Shall the patriot of humanity repose by the Werther of politics!!!¹⁷

Though this polemic initially juxtaposes one distinguished Irish statesman who opposed the 1800 Act of Union with another, equally distinguished, who supported it, Byron’s concluding sentence should be taken as being more than a sarcastic attempt to belittle Castlereagh through literary vogueishness. Castlereagh, as the critic Ellen Crowell suggests, was apparently perceived as being something of a dandified figure in early nineteenth-century London.¹⁸ Leaving aside Byron’s own involvement in a self-conscious fashionability of dress and manners, the poet’s invocation of Goethe’s 1774 novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* here serves rhetorically to undermine the establishment consensus that Castlereagh should be absolved from complicity in his own death. Byron is not suggesting that Castlereagh is actually a *reader* of Goethe’s fiction. Rather, he is associating the politician’s dandyism with the fashionable Wertherism that effectively projected an awareness of Goethe’s eponymous hero beyond his novel’s pages and into contemporary cultural currency.¹⁹ Thus, the poet’s polemic implies that Castlereagh, like the fictional Werther, is morbidly sentimental, self-indulgently gloomy and – in consequence – liable to the type of studied *Weltschmerz* that led Goethe’s hero to take his own life. In this reading of Castlereagh, Byron reconjures the suicidal politician as a figure culpable in his own death, his behaviour being a reflection of a lucid – rather than an insane – mental state.

Byron’s parting suggestion that Castlereagh’s death – like Manfred’s abdication in *The Castle of Otranto* – might prove ‘a “moral lesson”’ to those in high office appears at first a somewhat conventional closure to the Preface’s polemic.²⁰ Its more profound implication, though, is to affirm that *any* active engagement in suicide must be considered as being more meaningful than a passive submission to inevitable or

unprovoked death. To commit suicide, in other words, is to make a statement, whether it be one of genuine and darkly profound despair or else a more theatrical seeking of attention which, nonetheless, still results in self-annihilation. Suicidal acts are thus a form of display and of performance. This much is implied by their initial appearance among the stock scenarios of Gothic fiction and Gothicised reportage. Walpole's Manfred attempts to lay 'violent hands on himself' in a tableau witnessed by, among others, the woman whose life he has just fatally compromised. Castlereagh took a penknife to his throat at the very moment at which his doctor entered the room, requesting that the witnessing physician catch him as he fell.²¹ The latter event, indeed, was presented to the public as a graphic tableau by, among others, George Cruikshank.²² In yet another tableau, this time in a context redolent of dramatic theatre, Byron's introspective Manfred is prevented from taking his own life by the timely intervention of a chamois hunter.²³ Suicide, arguably, must be *witnessed*, by a reader as much as by a fictional character or an inquest-summonsed witness. If there is no living mortal present to passively witness or to actively intervene, then the act of finding the suicide's body, the ritual of inscribing meaning to the act that has taken place, of imposing an explanation, must serve that same purpose of significance and containment. Such implications accompany, for example, the last testimonies of nineteenth-century fictional suicides such as Robert Wringhim and Henry Jekyll, just as much as they do the contemporary tabloid journalism which rationalises the suicide note, posed body and presumed mental condition of celebrity suicides such as Kurt Cobain.²⁴

Byron's rendering of Castlereagh's death in Gothic terms serves to differentiate the poet's own dissident opinion from the conventional eulogies that lauded the dead man to his grave.²⁵ Byron's deployment of medical and legal casuistry, though, is indicative of a growing cultural awareness that suicide, as a significant and meaningful act, could not be understood by theological interpretation alone. Indeed, as Byron makes clear, suicide cannot be delimited, either, as a singular phenomenon confined to those afflicted by mental illness. Despair, in other words, may be a *facet* of mental illness, but it is not a mental illness in itself – and despair, caused by any number of personal, social or intellectual factors, might provoke any individual to take their own life, willingly, deliberately and knowingly. Byron's commentary upon Castlereagh is thus generated not merely by a literary consciousness

which specifically draws on the poet's reading of Goethe, but likewise by a broader cultural understanding that suicide is a meaningful – rather than a mad – act, and an act further bound up with performance and self-fashioning. Castlereagh's death has often been cited as a factor in British culture's adjustment of legal, as well as moral, attitudes towards suicide – though, as Byron's own deployment of literary suicidal tropes arguably reveals, the parliamentarian's final act, be it despairingly mad or stylistically sane, is a relatively late component of a greater epistemological debate.²⁶

Byron's choice of Gothic as a literary medium to interrogate the act of suicide is thus far from random. Indeed, the genre has been historically consistent in its deployment of self-murder as a distinguishing characteristic, and indeed ultimate fate, of many of its Gothic heroes. If Walpole's *Manfred* sets a precedent echoed by the despairing figure who shares his name in Byron's verse drama, then later characters – such as Radcliffe's Schedoni, who poisons both himself and his nemesis, Nicola di Zampari – develop further the possibilities of suicide as an evocative plot device. This is in addition to its status as a convenient, if not noble and poignant, way to dispatch thoughtful, though faulted, hero figures, implicitly associating their demise with the grandeur of self-sacrifice rather than the sordid matter of retributive execution.²⁷ Such figures effectively atone for their crimes, even when they die unrepentant, by their removal from human existence: that atonement, though, is compromised by the emphasis which their choice of self-murder places on their ultimate resistance to submission to the desires, justice or mercy of others.

For other Gothic heroes, suicide might be seen as somewhat less of a decision and more of an accident. When applied to the *doppelgänger* – a frequently encountered facet of the Gothic hero – the demise of one party necessarily involves the death of the other. The death of Henry Jekyll through the suicide of Edward Hyde – the servant Poole's account suggests that Hyde was incarnate for eight days before he administered the vial of cyanide to himself – appears to have been anticipated by both as a logical conclusion to their chemically conjoined lives.²⁸ For other doubled protagonists, the fatal consequences of aggression towards the doubled self are perhaps unforeseen. Poe's William Wilson stabs his more knowing second self, only contemplating his self-destruction when he comes to perceive a mirror rather than an antagonist.²⁹ Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, likewise, stabs his portrait to destroy its capacity, in his eyes, to serve

as evidence of his crimes. Gray's instantaneous death (to say nothing of his consequent physiological transformation and the picture's restoration) appears not to have been contemplated in this destruction of 'this mirror of his soul'.³⁰ Accidental and unforeseen though they might be, these literary suicides are as pregnant with meaning as those deliberately engaged in by other desperate Gothic figures. They reflect, arguably, the inability of a self which self-consciously rejoices in transgression to perceive of its actions as transgressive: the simultaneous self, in other words, is never fully understood as a self – even as an abjected self – until it is far too late. Self-murder thus becomes an unforeseen act of atonement and disarmament for the suicide, one which perhaps brings a sense of closure and of restitution for the crimes committed in the eyes of the reader, but one whose bleakness leaves the moral status of the unrepentant protagonist still open and unresolved.³¹ A suicide, whether undertaken volitionally or accidentally, is always significant, always capable of being related to the past actions of the protagonists by the reader, even where the character is less ready to participate in the text's moral script. The act of suicide is thus fundamental to the Gothic.

The chapters in *Suicide and the Gothic* reflect both the complexity and the diversity of this recurrent theme in the Gothic. They are all specially commissioned for this collection and, acknowledging the tenor of the International Gothic series, embrace an international as well as historical consideration of the place suicide occupies within Gothic stylistics. The works under consideration in *Suicide and the Gothic* range from the canonical to the scarcely read, and interrogate cultural traditions as diverse as those of Europe and Asia across a comprehensive range of media, from the eighteenth-century origins of the literary Gothic to the contemporaneity of the videogame.

In 'Scottish revenants: Caledonian fatality' in Thomas Percy's *Reliques*, Frank Ferguson and Danni Glover discuss Thomas Percy's *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, first published in 1765. A comprehensive three-volume set of British ballads, it was one of the most significant collections of the century, and its influence on British editors and writers was felt for generations afterwards. The backdrop for this literary endeavour was a culture war in English and Scottish literature which emanated from the Glorious Revolution in the late seventeenth century and found expression in a variety of texts. At the core of this battle was a struggle for cultural superiority between Scotland and England. Percy's approach was a Gothic riposte to this

phenomenon in two senses. First, in a historiographical sense, he posited a conception of British literary history which maintained that the English were cultural inheritors of the Goths, a racial grouping which he believed was superior and different to Scotland's antecedents, the Celts. By advancing this idea, Percy was aiming to defend and consolidate a cultural position that favoured an interpretation of English predominance over other constituent members of the United Kingdom. Secondly, he anticipates Gothic literary approaches in his treatment of Scotland as practically a suicidal nation. If Ossianic poetry is a lament for the human subject caught in the predicament of age and death, the *Reliques* determines a judgement on Scotland that it is an unstable, barbarous place which precipitates self-slaughter. Though intended as a unifying text between the constituent nations of Great Britain, Percy's *Reliques* asserts Scotland as a dangerous, if minor, doppelgänger of England – a national space which exists in Britain's past and in the eternal moment of its own death.

Lisa Vargo, in 'Male and female Werthers: Romanticism and Gothic suicide', examines the influence of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) on a generation of women writers including Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Dacre and Mary Shelley. Vargo argues that Goethe's text became influential on the Gothic when women writers reworked its theme of sensibility into a Gothic one. Sensibility, as a key register of women's writing during the period, is subject to a radical critical scrutiny in this transformation. The gendered aspects of 'Wertherism' as a cult of romantic suicide can, Vargo argues, be looked at anew in terms of how female-authored Gothic texts generated gendered readings of suicide and its motivation. Such a reading facilitates a new way of thinking about Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Women* (1798), Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) and Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), among other novels and poems from the period.

In "The supposed incipency of mental disease": guilt, regret and suicide in three ghost stories by J. Sheridan Le Fanu', William Hughes argues that, although in recent years J. Sheridan Le Fanu's ghost-story collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1871) has been interpreted through its Gothic, medical and theological contexts, its enactments of self-annihilation have never been properly explored. The first three narratives in *In a Glass Darkly*, 'Green Tea', 'The Familiar' and 'Mr Justice Harbottle', depict troubled, indeed persecuted, individuals – a diffident clergyman, a retired naval officer, a notorious and corrupt

hanging judge – whose lives end prematurely following a personal contemplation of past actions known to themselves, but not to their contemporaries. This chapter considers the deteriorating mental states of the Reverend Jennings and Captain Barton, the respective protagonists of ‘Green Tea’ and ‘The Familiar’, and the retrospective account which charts the final days of the unfortunate Mr Justice Harbottle. The variant testimonies of Jennings and Barton, and of the witness who in each case reports and interprets the behaviour of these fatalistic individuals, are examined in the context of the ambiguous presences that both haunt them and hasten their end. In the case of Harbottle, the imposition of justice finally done through the act of self-destruction is emphatic. All three tales amply illustrate the complex relationship between introspection and self-destruction in the persecutory tradition of Gothic fiction.

Andrew Smith, in “‘The body of a self-destroyer’: suicide and the self in the fin-de-siècle Gothic’, explores why so many fin-de-siècle Gothic novels conclude on equally complex, if different, forms of suicide, including Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and Machen’s *The Great God Pan* (1894). Smith argues that, in *Jekyll and Hyde*, images of the self-destructive self should be seen within the context of models of social self-destruction found in theories of degeneration. The writings of Edwin Lankester and Max Nordau, in particular, suggest that society is prone to self-destruction when it becomes overly refined and collapses back on to itself. Images of the individual body thus need to be related to wider issues of the body politic. However, Smith argues that the fin-de-siècle Gothic does not simply *replicate* the terms used in theories of degeneration but rather *scrutinises* how images of wealth, cultural refinement and class-bound models of ‘civilisation’ lead to Gothic representations of self-destruction that strangely liberate the subject from the demands of the ostensibly degenerate body.

In “‘To be mistress of her own fate’: suicide as control and contagion in the works of Richard Marsh’, Graeme Pedlingham argues that the late Victorian period saw a marked anxiety around the seemingly inexorable rise in instances of suicide. Commentators from across Victorian society increasingly sought to understand the reasons for what William Knighton, in 1881, termed ‘Suicidal Mania’, and to assess its significance. The subject held a particular fascination for Richard Marsh, one of the most prolific and popular fiction writers of the period, with representations of suicide and reflections

on it featuring widely throughout his Gothic *oeuvre*. But this interest goes further than the astute incorporation of cultural anxieties, which Marsh often used as a key technique for heightening the disturbing effects of his work, to considerations of its social, philosophical and scientific import. This is evidenced not only through his fiction between 1891 and 1910 but also by an unpublished essay (in the University of Reading archives), simply entitled 'Suicide'. In both the essay 'Suicide' and much of his Gothic fiction, Marsh captures a sense of ambivalence regarding suicide that speaks to its often contradictory status at this time. In his work, suicide takes on an unsettling uncertainty. This chapter considers Marsh's multifaceted conception of suicide in relation to the contemporaneous medical discourses in Britain that informed and provoked wider debates on the subject, including suicide's seemingly contagious potential.

Bridget M. Marshall, in 'Suicide as justice? The self-destroying Gothic villain in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood*', begins by exploring how Ann Radcliffe and Charles Brockden Brown represent suicide as a way of achieving justice. Suicides by villains prevent the justice system (its processes and its outcomes) from further harming victims; they enable the legal system to have executions without executioners. Radcliffe and Brown's suicide solution for their Gothic villains is taken one step further in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self*, originally serialised in *Colored American Magazine* between 1902 and 1903. On the first page of the novel, the main character, Reuel Briggs, asks, 'Is suicide wrong?', setting up an ongoing obsession of both the character and the text. After many plot twists and revelations, the novel's Gothic villain, Aubrey Livingston, commits murder. Another character intones, 'Justice will be done', and shortly thereafter, Aubrey's body is found floating in the Charles River. The narrator later explains that Aubrey was persuaded to commit suicide by a voice that tells him to, a voice which he had seemingly encountered while under hypnotic influence. According to the laws of Telassar – the imagined ancient kingdom in Africa that is the setting of half of the novel – men are made to commit suicide when they become murderers so that they become their own executioners. This chapter thus explores the ways that Hopkins represents the relationship between suicide and justice and how the African context impacts on that.

In 'Gothic influences: darkness and suicide in the work of Patricia Highsmith', Fiona Peters examines Patricia Highsmith's beliefs on

suicide. When, for example, Highsmith's friend Arthur Koestler committed suicide along with his wife due to his leukaemia and Parkinson's disease, she was both shocked and furious. Peters focuses specifically on the Ripley novels by Highsmith and examines the relationship between the Gothic and crime fiction and the complex indebtedness between the forms. In her second Tom Ripley novel, *Ripley Under Ground* (1970), Highsmith's favourite 'hero' hounds an artist to death. Bernard Tufts has been forging paintings for Tom and his criminal gang, in the name of Derwatt, another painter who committed suicide several years before the novel begins. Knowing Bernard to be suicidal, Tom terrifies him until he leaps to his death from a cliff top in Austria. Prior to this, Bernard has faked his own death by hanging in the cellar in Tom's home near Paris. This novel contains multiple Gothic themes throughout; both mountains and the domestic home space are utilised to evoke the terrors both of the chase and the homely, the sublime and the domestic. Peters' focus on suicide across the Ripley novels provides an important new way of thinking about how the Gothic and crime fiction can be linked.

Xavier Aldana Reyes and Rachid M'Rabty, in 'Better not to have been: Thomas Ligotti and the "suicide" of the human race', explore what could be termed Ligotti's materialistic pessimism, or the belief that conscious and rational life is inherently tragic, as it is largely dominated by the experience of pain and the realisation of the inevitability of death. More specifically, their chapter focuses on one of Ligotti's recurring solutions to the quandary of existence – suicide – in selected stories from *Songs of a Dead Dreamer* (1986), *Grimscribe* (1991) and *The Spectral Link* (2014), but also in his non-fiction treatise *The Conspiracy against the Human Race* (2010) and his interviews in *Born to Fear* (2014). For Ligotti, antinatalism, or mass suicide as a way of preventing future generations from suffering the same fate, becomes an appealing – perhaps even the only real – option for a human race which has, thus far, preferred to believe in the absurdity of futurity and the fallacy of persistence.

In 'Vampire suicide', Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock argues that among the more counterintuitive tropes of the vampire genre is the propensity of vampires to attempt suicide (often successfully), which they do with curious regularity and for three main reasons: first, because they cannot bear what they have become; second, because their martyrdom will save someone they love; or, third, because the ponderous weight of centuries crushes their zest for life. Weinstock focuses on

these three motivations for vampire suicide – *vampire guilt*, *vampire martyrdom* and *vampire ennui*. Weinstock explores Anne Rice's sustained attention to suicide in her Vampire Chronicles novels. After noting the motivations for vampire suicide in the literary Gothic, Weinstock explores vampire suicidal tendencies in a number of recent films and TV programmes, including Park Chan-wook's 2009 film, *Thirst*, and the HBO series *True Blood*. He argues that such narratives constitute a half-hearted attempt at recuperating the vampire genre from charges of immorality through a strategy of inversion. In folklore and in some popular culture texts, the punishment for the mortal sin of suicide is precisely to become a vampire. The consequence of the sin of unmaking is to become the embodiment of sin. Vampire suicide, particularly in instances of guilt or martyrdom, becomes a type of cleansing, made clear through the preferred means of self-slaughter: suicide by sunlight.

Katarzyna Ancuta, in 'Under the dying sun: suicide and the Gothic in modern Japanese literature and culture', discusses the changing representation of suicide in selected Japanese literary and visual texts, focusing on four twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels – *Kokoro* by Natsume Soseki (1914), *The Silent Cry* by Kenzaburo Oe (1967), *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami (1987) and Tomotake Ishikawa's *Gray Men* (2012), with reference to selected films and manga. Ancuta argues that these narratives have departed from the historic and nationalistic notion of suicide as a noble death in favour of a more Gothic version of the theme. This Gothic dimension is realised through the construction of the characters and the bleak landscapes they inhabit. Alienated from society, often living in self-imposed exile, prone to depression or other forms of mental illness, trapped in toxic, dysfunctional relationships and elaborate masochistic rituals, these melancholy individuals accept suicide with fatalistic abandon as an inevitable conclusion to their insignificant lives, or embrace it as the ultimate act of non-conformism and defiance against authority.

In "I will abandon this body and take to the air": the suicide at the heart of *Dear Esther*, Dawn Stobbart examines how Gothic tropes and narrative form converge in the 2012 videogame *Dear Esther*. Set in a perpetual twilight, on a deserted Hebridean island, this game is part of a growing sub-genre known as the 'first-person walker', which involves the player exploring a typically Gothic space – a setting as evocative as that of *Frankenstein* or *Wuthering Heights*. Through a sub-version of gaming expectations and tropes, Stobbart argues that *Dear*

Esther's control system, and lack of interactivity with the game's landscape, allows the player to take the role of a ghost, haunting the island, as she uncovers a narrative of loss and suicide. Stobbart further argues that through the game's construction, the player forces the narrator, an unnamed male whom the player hears as she walks across and even inside the island delivering fragments of letters to the titular *Esther*, to endlessly repeat his suicide and the events that led up to it.

This is the first chapter collection to consider at length the place of suicide in the Gothic. Its intention is to extend the critical parameters of scholarship on the genre and to stimulate further debate regarding how the Gothic explores challenging themes.

Notes

- 1 Deuteronomy 19, v. 22, italics as rendered in the King James Version of the Old Testament.
- 2 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, in *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother*, edited by Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2003), pp. 57–165, at p. 159. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.
- 3 See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 94, where, on the death of Manfred's son, the garrulous servant Bianca informs Matilda that 'As you are become his heiress, he is impatient to have you married: he has always been raving for more sons; I warrant he is now impatient for grandsons.'
- 4 The bodies and personal effects of suicides were finally relieved of the punitive consequences enshrined in British law through the passage of the right to burial act (1823) and the abolition of forfeiture act (1870): see Alan H. Marks, 'Historical Suicide', in Clifton D. Bryant (ed.), *Handbook of Death and Dying* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), Vol. 1, pp. 309–18, at pp. 315–16. Suicide was decriminalised in England and Wales through the passage of the suicide act on 3 August 1961 and via related legislation in Northern Ireland: in Scotland, however, suicide had not been a crime since the eighteenth century. See: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/9-10/60, accessed 7 March 2018; Jennifer Green and Michael Green, *Dealing With Death: A Handbook of Practices, Procedures and Law* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2006), p. 176; J. Neeleman, 'Suicide as a Crime in the UK: Legal History, International Comparisons and Present Implications', *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 94:4 (October 1996), 252–7.
- 5 Anon., 'The Late Marquis of Londonderry: Coroner's Report', *Morning Post*, 14 August 1822, p. 3, cols 2–3.
- 6 George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, in *The Works of Lord Byron, Complete in One Volume* (London: John Murray, 1842), pp. 578–760, at p. 667. Byron was not alone in noting a canting change in tone by those who had on occasions been detractors of the late viscount: see Anon., 'The Marquis of Londonderry', *Morning Post*, 17 August 1822, p. 3, cols 1–2.

- 7 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, in Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (eds), *William Shakespeare: Complete Works* (Basingstoke: Macmillan/The Royal Shakespeare Company, 2008), pp. 1801–58, at p. 1837: Act 3, sc. ii, ll.70–135. The passage contains a further allusion to Shakespeare, the ‘syllables of dolour’ being an adaptation of a phrase to be found in *Macbeth* Act 4, sc. iii, l.9 (*ibid.*, p. 1900).
- 8 Radical sentiment with regard to Castlereagh is inevitably bound up with Percy Bysshe Shelley’s 1819 portrayal of the politician as Murder personified: see *The Mask of Anarchy*, in Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Ninth Edition, Volume D: The Romantic Period* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), pp. 779–89, at p. 779: Stanza 2, l.5. Though the later years of the two radicals named by Byron are obscure, neither is recorded as having met his end by suicide.
- 9 See Donna T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 116–17.
- 10 See ‘Suicide’, in John M. Ross (ed.), *The Illustrated Globe Encyclopædia* (London: Thomas C. Jack, 1884), 12 vols, Vol. 11, p. 159. Such crossroad interments retained an evocative, though residual, power at the time of Castlereagh’s death: see Anon., ‘Mr Abel Griffiths’, *Sunday Times*, 6 July 1823, p. 2, col. 5.
- 11 See a pseudonymous letter in *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, dated 10 May 1765, in which a previous correspondent is described as ‘vampire like’ [*sic*] in his defamation of the dead: *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, 3 June 1765, p. 532, col. 1. Byron used the term in supernatural context in *The Giaour* (1813). See Lord Byron, *The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale, Eighth Edition, with Some Additions* (London: John Murray, 1813), p. 72, ns 37, 38.
- 12 Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 30.
- 13 ‘The Order for the Burial of the Dead’, in *The Book of Common Prayer and the Administration of the Sacraments ... According to the Use of the Church of England* (London: SPCK, n.d.), pp. 346–50, at p. 346. Though formally baptised into the Irish Presbyterian tradition, Castlereagh was educated as a member of the Church of England to qualify him for government service. See John Bew, *Castlereagh: The Biography of a Statesman* (London: Quercus, 2011), Ch. 2.
- 14 Anon., ‘The Late Marquis of Londonderry: Coroner’s Report’, p. 3, col. 3.
- 15 Byron, *Don Juan*, p. 667. Italics in original.
- 16 Though not emphasised in the reporting of the coroner’s inquest, Castlereagh’s political career in Ireland, including his suppression of the 1798 Rebellion, was frequently referenced in the obituaries that immediately followed his death. See, for example, Anon., ‘The Late Marquess of Londonderry’, *The Times*, 13 August 1822, p. 3, col. 1.
- 17 Byron, *Don Juan*, p. 667.
- 18 Ellen Crowell, *The Dandy in Irish and American Southern Fiction: Aristocratic Drag* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 67.
- 19 Byron was himself instrumental in perpetuating a residual Wertherism in the nineteenth century: see Bernard Dieterle, ‘Wertherism and the Romantic Weltanschauung’, in Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel and Bernard Dieterle

- (eds), *Romantic Prose Fiction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008), pp. 22–40, at pp. 35–6.
- 20 Byron, *Don Juan*, p. 667. Byron enforces his point through an allusion to Ben Jonson's Roman play, *Sejanus His Fall* (1603).
- 21 Anon., 'The Late Marquis of Londonderry: Coroner's Report', col. 3.
- 22 See Ron Brown, *The Art of Suicide* (London: Reaktion, 2001), p. 143.
- 23 Lord Byron, *Manfred: A Dramatic Poem*, in *The Works of Lord Byron, Complete in One Volume* (London: John Murray, 1842), pp. 175–92, at p. 181: Act 1, sc. Ii, ll. 114–20. Despite its dramatic ambience, *Manfred* is a work designed for dramatised reading rather than full-scale theatrical production.
- 24 James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. Adrian Hunter (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview, 2001), pp. 221–2; Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, ed. M. R. Ridley (London: Dent, 1964), p. 62; Olivia Waring, 'With the Lights Out: How Did Kurt Cobain Die, What Did His Suicide Note Say and What Are the Theories about the Nirvana Rocker's Death?', *Sun*, 4 August 2017, available online at www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/4161956/how-kurt-cobain-die-suicide-note/, accessed 7 March 2018.
- 25 Whatever the niceties observed by the middle and upper classes, the proletarian heirs of Peterloo were less forgiving, at times to the point of ribald celebration. See, for example, Anon., 'The Marquis of Londonderry', *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 24 August 1822, p. 1, cols 1–2.
- 26 See, for example, Brown, *The Art of Suicide*, p. 144.
- 27 Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, ed. Frederick Garber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 403–4.
- 28 Stevenson, *Strange Case*, pp. 34, 39, 62.
- 29 Edgar Allan Poe, 'William Wilson', in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Chatham River Press, 1981), pp. 212–25, at p. 225.
- 30 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 187.
- 31 Note here Wilde's emphasis on Gray merely shrugging his shoulders when he considers 'his own sin' immediately prior to stabbing the portrait: *ibid.*, p. 187.