

Beyond the Veil: Cross-Cultural & Interdisciplinary Studies of Horror, Gothic, and the Occult in the Nineteenth Century

FREE ONLINE EVENT

Date: 31 October 2022

Time: 9:45-17:00 (CET)

There was a cultural fascination with otherworldly entities and the macabre during the nineteenth century. From the publication of horror novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), to popular forms of entertainment such as phantasmagoria. Themes such as death, monsters, and supernatural forces were regularly featured in art, literature, architecture, theatre, and even the sciences. The nineteenth century also witnessed the emergence of the modern spiritualist movement and séances. As the sensation surrounding spirit and psychic phenomena blossomed, a new kind of belief in the supernatural spread across the globe. This new form of occultic belief intersected with other long-standing ones, not only in Europe and North America, but also in places such as Asia and Africa. This online workshop hosted by the Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies International will feature a series of talks that explore some of the ways nineteenth-century people in different cultural contexts engaged with horror, gothic, and occultic topics.

Programme

9:45-10:00 (CET): WELCOME ADDRESS

10:00-10:45 (CET): SESSION 1

Chair: Nathan Bossoh, University College London

Speaker: Kazuki Inoue, University of Tokyo

Psychical Research at the Intersection of East and West: *Shinrei Kenkyû* in Japan from the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century

According to Shin'ich Yoshinaga's "Spiritualism and Occultism" in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Japanese Religions* (2021), the early history of spiritualism and occultism in Japan has been neglected. This can be ascribed, he argues, to the fact that a large

number of occult groups appeared and disappeared over a short period of time, though in the 1980s, thanks to many pioneering works, the critical landscape crucially changed. Nevertheless, spiritualism and occultism in Japan, particularly related to the complex acceptance of Western psychical research from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, is still open to debate. This paper will explore how the Japanese cultural imagination was affected by *shinrei kenkyû*, a Japanese translation of “psychical research.” In addition to Yoshinaga’s “Spiritualism and Occultism”, intellectual contexts about psychical research in Japan have been picked up in, for example, Hirotaka Ichiyanagi’s “*Kokkuri-san*” to “*senrigan*” [“*Table-turning*” and “*Clairvoyance*”] (1994; revised in 2021) and a co-edited book by Hidehiko Kurita, Hotaka Tsukada, and Shin’ichi Yoshinaga, *Kin-gendai Nihon no minkan seishin ryôhō* [Modern and Contemporary Folk Psychospiritual Therapies] (2019). As a critical response to them, this presentation traces how Japanese people of the time, including a well-known Japanese writer, Sôseki Natsume, imported and adapted ideas from psychical research, particularly those of Frederic Myers and William James, and aims at teasing out the complex history of the translated word, *shinrei*, which as Yoshinaga (2021) argues, means both “mind” or “soul” and “spiritual” or “psychic.”

11:00-11:45 (CET): SESSION 2

Chair: Christine Ferguson, University of Stirling

Speaker: Kirstin Mills, Macquarie University

Lucas Malet’s Occult Gothic at the Victorian Fin de siècle

Lucas Malet (Mary St Leger Kingsley) was a celebrated author at the Victorian fin de siècle, among whose many works sit two curious Gothic novels that simultaneously beguiled and confused critics of her day. *The Carissima: A Modern Grotesque* (1896) is a tale about a doomed marriage and a haunted man, and *The Gateless Barrier* (1900) tells the tale of an intrepid explorer of scientific thinking whose inheritance of a haunted house propels him into uncharted supernatural realms. Drawing on a long history of nineteenth-century Gothic trappings as much as contemporary social politics and science, Malet brings these elements together in a strong, if ghostly, sense of the occult. In particular, Malet’s novels explore an occult fourth dimension (a contemporary spiritualist and scientific hypothesis) that is at once anchored in

Romantic Gothic ancestries hearkening back to the Gothic poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and yet which also charts contemporary gender politics. This cross-temporal occultism also explains the stylistic divergence between the two novels that has so far confused critics, where *The Carissima* seems to model the 'male' or 'Lewisite' Gothic while *The Gateless Barrier* models the 'female' or 'Radcliffean' Gothic. Malet's novels, as I will propose in this talk, operate together as two poles of an occult dialectic that explores the potential physical and psychological conditions required to access the spiritual fourth dimension. Immensely popular in her day, Malet's work is only now returning to light, and this talk aims to illuminate her position amidst the late Victorian Gothic.

12:00-12:45 (CET): SESSION 3

Chair: Emma Merklung, The Courtauld Institute of Art

Speaker: Giuliano D'Amico

Ghosts and Spectrality in Henrik Ibsen's Early Plays

Past events and their consequences are usually considered the fulcrum of Henrik Ibsen's modern dramaturgy. In his last twelve plays, starting with *Pillars of the Community* (1877) and ending with *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), Ibsen focuses on the struggles of a bourgeois class that tries to come to terms with their past actions and their consequences. Not surprisingly, the metaphorical "ghosts" of Ibsen's modern plays have started to be investigated through the lenses of theories on spectrality (Burr 1987, Balkin 2019), but very little, if any research has focused on his plays where ghosts *actually* appear on the stage and interact with other characters. This is mostly the case of early, historical plays such as *Catiline* (1850), *The Pretenders* (1864) and *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), but also one of his modern ones, *Brand* (1866). In contrast to previous scholarship (Burr 1987, Rudi 2010) that sees ghosts as projections or reflections of character's minds, in this talk I will focus on ghosts as "spectral characters" (Balkin 2019) with their own legitimacy. Drawing upon the so-called "spectral turn", but also looking at the heritage of Gothic literature and melodrama, this talk will investigate the textual function of these ghosts in Ibsen's dramaturgy, as well as the material conditions of their rendering on stage.

13:00-14:00 (CET): LUNCH BREAK

14:00-14:45 (CET): SESSION 4

Chair: Christa DiMarco, University of the Arts

Speaker: Julian Strube, *University of Vienna*

What is “the Occult” and What Does it Mean for Transcultural Perspectives?

In recent years, the category of “the occult” has gained currency in transcultural, global, and regional studies beyond “the West.” This reflects a growing awareness of the fact that the term’s meanings were historically shaped within a global context, not only when it became popular in the twentieth century, but also with regard to its genealogy reaching back to the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet, the fields in which the term is increasingly being employed—most notably, global history (Green 2015), Japanese studies (Gaitanidis and Stein 2019), and South Asian studies (Bhatia 2020)—remain oddly disconnected. Moreover, upon closer look, the term’s meaning often remains unclear and is rarely subject to in-depth theorization and historical contextualization. This paper will propose an approach to “the occult” as a transcultural category that is based on its historicization within the broader framework of a global religious history. It will provide a genealogy of its semantic development as well as the historical contexts that conditioned and structured that development, with a focus on exchanges between Europe and Bengal since the nineteenth century. Finally, it will offer concrete methodical tools for its use as a scholarly category across different disciplines and fields of study.

15:00-15:45 (CET): SESSION 5

Chair: Kate Oestreich, Coastal Carolina University

Speaker: Emily Vincent, University of Birmingham

“her fund of “spook” is illimitable”: Sensationalising the Gothic in Florence Marryat’s *Fin-de-Siècle* Supernatural Fiction

From the 1880s onwards, prolific author of sensation fiction and ardent spiritualist Florence Marryat (1833-1899) turned her audacious eye to a new mode. One 1897 periodical hailed Marryat as a “novelist of the occult” producing “remarkable books

dealing with Spiritualism”, all the while praising her boundless gothic imagination: “her fund of “spook” is illimitable”. Published in the same year as *Dracula* and *The Beetle*, Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), dramatises contemporary desires for Othering horror and the gothic. Marryat unnerves readers through her wide-ranging journey into unexpected occult peripheries. From Obeah witchcraft, to Satanism, and ‘mad scientist’ vivisection, Marryat’s examination of the necromantic both enthralls and repulses. Marryat is audacious in casting her vampiric protagonist as a psychic vampire whose very identity transgresses vampire lore through an appetite which rejects a lust for blood. In Marryat’s spiritualism narrative, *The Strange Transfiguration of Hannah Stubbs* (1896), she sensationalises the gendered power imbalances of the séance room. Marryat induces shock by presenting the female medium as one subjected to intoxication, enforced binding, and abuses of power which seek to control her “occult faculties”. Marryat addresses how séance gothic can be dark, oppressive, and deeply troubling, but also how it can provoke an examination of the medium’s economic role. This paper will argue that Marryat’s cacophony of gothic themes imbues her supernatural fiction with a distinctly sensational character which blurs boundaries between the ghostly, gothic, and occult.

16:00-16:45 (CET): SESSION 6

Chair: Efram Sera-Shriar, Durham University

Speaker: Roger Luckhurst, Birkbeck, University of London

The Ghost Club Assemblage

The Ghost Club was set up in 1882 by the Spiritualist medium, the Reverend Stainton Moses, and the tax inspector and occultist A. A. Watts. For over fifty years the Ghost Club’s Brothers gathered in small numbers once a month to tell ‘true’ ghost stories to each other and discuss all matters psychical, spiritual and occult in a relaxed post-prandial atmosphere, away from the noisy and disputatious public sphere. Guests included Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Ernest Wallis Budge, W. B. Yeats and Sir Harry Johnstone. Unusually, the Club meticulously minuted every meeting, leaving a record of thousands of handwritten bureaucratic pages. Only a cross-disciplinary approach can follow the wide and sometimes wild interests of the Brothers: psychical research

investigations, automatic writing, colonial policy in West Africa, supernatural assistance at croquet or bridge, photography, Indian fakirs, mind-reading, astronomy, Westminster gossip, theology. Following Bruno Latour, I'll suggest this discourse is a heterogeneous assemblage that helps construct an unusually full portrait of Victorian gentlemanly interest in the occult.