

## Between Science and Supernaturalism: Mimesis and the Uncanny in Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Culture

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A brief report published in *Nature* in September 2006 describes the induction of ‘an illusory shadow person’ through electrical stimulation of the left temporoparietal junction. This illusory person, according to the researchers, closely shadowed the patient’s body position and posture.<sup>1</sup> Literary scholars may have blanched at such news. Could all the rich traditions of image and narrative surrounding the doppelgänger be divested of their uncanny power by one simple laboratory experiment?

Although changing parameters of scientific understanding may trigger shifts in our relationship with imaginative traditions, this is, of course, no straightforward matter of new knowledge replacing outmoded and archaic forms of belief. Any cultural tensions that may have been stirred by the experiment reported in *Nature* were already in play a century earlier. Scottish physician John Ferriar published *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* in 1813, in which he observed ‘that in certain diseases of the brain, such as delirium and insanity, spectral delusions take place’. More specifically, these impressions may be due to an infection or damaged tissue in a particular area of the brain, which renders the patient liable to delusions of sight or sound that do not impair larger aspects of brain function, such as judgement or memory.<sup>2</sup> Ferriar, nevertheless, was a great advocate for the ‘delights’ of Gothic storytelling, and his book is a tongue-in-cheek treatise on how not to spoil them. Although an apparently supernatural encounter may be due to a peculiar condition of the sensorium, no explanatory framework from pure physiology can quite stand up to the imaginative force of the experience.

Curiously placed between the realms of science and supernaturalism, the phenomenon of the uncanny double has a distinctive presence in both. Since the early nineteenth century, it has demonstrated a propensity to weave its way from one to the other, creating a margin of subtle overlay rather than provoking a critical stand-off between mutually exclusive states

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<sup>1</sup> Shahar Arzy and others, ‘Induction of an Illusory Shadow Person’, *Nature*, 443 (2006), 287–88 (p. 287).

<sup>2</sup> John Ferriar, *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1813), pp. 14–15.

of cognition. Another kind of duality is at issue in the imagined presence of the doppelgänger, as a figure in both physical and mental life. While the phenomenon of the Brocken spectre is one of the era's most resonant manifestations of an uncanny mirroring of the body, later nineteenth-century developments in clinical psychology began to focus on the sense of an alien presence in the mind. As they did so, these clinical experiments involved an engagement with the interweave of mental and physiological expression. In Nicholas Royle's words, the uncanny is associated with 'a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural'.<sup>3</sup> Somewhere between the conviction afforded by cognitive processes and the flickering sense intimated by the live wiring of the nervous system, new dimensions of reading and interpretation were opened up.

My concern here is to explore how the overlay of scientific and supernaturalist frames is managed in some of the more influential literary and dramatic portrayals of uncanny mimesis. At the outer limits of psychological inference, there might be some foreign agency residing in unknown reaches of the human brain. Such hypotheses were certainly within the speculative domain of research on evolution. Robert Louis Stevenson may have rendered the primordial double as a full-blown Gothic fantasy in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), but, as Julia Reid stresses, the story also reflects his scholarly interests in evolution and the enduring vitality of primitive states of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> In the Jekyll and Hyde doubling, the physiological and the psychological seem to produce each other: the body of Hyde replicates and literalizes the atavistic brain states that continue to haunt the modern mind. As a growing sense that civilized humans were unable to read their own minds began to take hold, a range of literary and dramatic works testified to a correlative obsession with reading the body as a medium for the mind's more occult communications.

In an article on phonographs and heredity in the fiction of Samuel Butler, Will Abberley points to how writers on human evolution drew a striking analogy between recording technologies and hereditary transmission.<sup>5</sup> This is expressed in terms that belong to the literature of the uncanny. Abberley quotes from the writings of Forbes Phillips: 'Whether we believe in apparitions or not, this world is a haunted one. Our thought world is full of deep undertones that roll in upon us from the past.'<sup>6</sup> Such metaphors expand the meaning of mimesis itself, with the implication that

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Will Abberley, "'His father's voice": Phonographs and Heredity in the Fiction of Samuel Butler', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 18 (2014), pp. 5–14 <<http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.680>>.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes Phillips, 'Ancestral Memory: A Suggestion', *Nineteenth Century*, June 1906, pp. 977–83 (p. 980), quoted in Abberley, p. 13.

some primordial being has laid down patterns of expression, thought, and behaviour that are continuously replicated. When this metaphorical hypothesis translates to the sense and sensation of an actual physical presence doubling that of the conscious individual, we are in the realms of the uncanny.

In an introduction to *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845), his sequel to *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), Thomas De Quincey reflected on the earlier work and its celebration of what he termed ‘the faculty of dreaming’. He saw this faculty as under threat in a rapidly changing environment, where advances in steam power and inventions that saw light ‘under harness as a slave for man’ were putting the human mind in a tumult.<sup>7</sup> De Quincey, with his obsessive interest in the brain and its capacities (‘brain’ is one of his favourite words), had visions of the uncanny encroaching in a synchronized advance, as ‘a jealousy of ghostly beings moving amongst us’ (p. 90). The jealousy implies a struggle between systems of control. De Quincey’s language evokes deep ancestral agency, and his metaphorical choices show remarkable parallels with those Abberley finds in writings on evolution.

In *Confessions*, De Quincey dwells on the image of the palimpsest as a model for the strata formation of the mind. Just as new chemical applications enable the retrieval of lost layers of writing in a manuscript, so the deeper layers of the mind may resurface under the influence of changing technologies. The recording is always retrievable. Seeking re-entry into the archaic strata of the psyche, De Quincey invokes the guidance of his ‘Dark Interpreter’, a being who resides in the hidden depths and who may, on occasion, make appearances ‘in open daylight’ (p. 164). Here he echoes Ferriar’s observation that

apparitions may be evoked, in open day, — at noon, if the case should be urgent, in the midst of a field, on the surface of water, or in the glare of a patent lamp, quite as easily, as in the ‘darkness of chaos or old night’. (Ferriar, p. viii)

In Ferriar’s terms, what this means is that the interpreter of uncanny experience no longer requires conditions of darkness and mental obscurity in order to function. The frisson of ghostly presence can be roused in the full glare of rational consciousness and scientific inquisition. As it comes to light it also becomes more embodied, more physical. De Quincey’s meaning is less firmly determined. His visitations from the furthest reaches of the psyche cast their own rays and cannot be confined to any system of insight. But the Dark Interpreter is no mere immaterial phantom. He has his origins in the organic functions of the brain.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas De Quincey, ‘Suspiria de Profundis’, in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater and Other Writings*, ed. by Barry Milligan (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 89–190 (p. 89).

Modernizations of the uncanny enlist the brain itself as a repository of mystery. In De Quincey's terms, the deeper reaches of the psyche are beyond human understanding. The uncanny double is a reflection from the depths, a shadow self, that Freud was all too ready to approach with an interpreter of his own in his landmark 1919 essay 'The Uncanny'. In Royle's view, the uncanny is 'not what Freud thinks' but what his essay teaches us is that it is 'something one does not know one's way about in' (p. 8). Doubling of bodies and dualities of mind produced signalling systems that no one knew how to read. Through the Romantic period and into the later Victorian era, the correlative mysteries of psychical and somatic otherness retained a compelling fascination, to which writers, artists, and actors responded in diverse ways.

### The spectre of the Brocken

Ferriar's statement about the apparition that may be invoked in broad daylight precedes a discussion of the phenomenon known as the Brocken spectre, and De Quincey's *Dark Interpreter* is conjured onto the page following an account of this same phenomenon. The Brocken is a granite peak in the Harz mountains in Saxony-Anhalt, where conditions favour the appearance of a spectacular optical illusion. Typically, it will appear at dawn or dusk at a point when horizontal rays from the sun cause the observer's shadow to be cast on to a bank of fog or mist some twenty to thirty metres away. This gives the impression of a gigantic figure hovering in the air. Descriptions of the spectre were circulating from the mid-eighteenth century among adventurers with interests in optics and meteorology, and the most influential of these was an essay written by J. Ludovic Jordan, who drew on a journal account made by the German traveller Haue in 1798.<sup>8</sup> Haue witnessed what appeared to be a spectral figure of enormous dimensions striding towards him, but, as a gust of wind passed, he saw that the figure raised an arm as he did, to hold onto its hat. This moment of bodily engagement triggers a cognitive transition. Once the phantom is recognized as a reflection, and thus an optical illusion, it is confined to the order of rational nature even while there are persistent intimations of the supernatural in the scale of it and the rainbow aura around its head. Jordan's account was translated for the *Philosophical Magazine*, then widely disseminated. De Quincey first heard of it from Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was so taken with it that he made a transcription in his notebook.

De Quincey's own evocation, then, is already drawing on a heritage of literary and scientific observation. Through the course of the nineteenth century the Brocken spectre continues to be a key narrative in the literature of the uncanny, but it maintains a dual occupancy in the domains of science

<sup>8</sup> J. L. Jordan, 'Observations on a Singular Phenomenon Called the Spectre of the Broken', *Philosophical Magazine*, 1 (1798), 232–35.

and supernatural fantasy. Coleridge makes reference to it in 'Constancy to an Ideal Object', a two-stanza poem in which the poet's dream of an ideal love is like the deluded vision of the woodman, as he makes his way out along the sheep's track at dawn and

Sees full before him, gliding without tread,  
An image with a glory round its head;  
The enamored rustic worships its fair hues,  
Not knows, he *makes* the shade he pursues.<sup>9</sup>

The 'enamored rustic' is of course a poetic invention, but the Brocken legend itself depends on such a witness: a naive observer, a consciousness still captive to folkloric explanations of the world who will be susceptible to an unmediated sense of supernatural intervention.

Walter Scott in his 1818 novel *The Antiquary* features a scene in which his own characters are entertained with a folkloric version of the legend, set in the later Middle Ages in the further reaches of the Harz mountains that are 'the chosen scenes for tales of witches, demons and apparitions'. For the local inhabitants, the Brocken spectre is 'a sort of tutelary demon, in the shape of a wild man of huge stature [...] bearing in his hand a pine torn up by the roots'.<sup>10</sup> This description evokes no nebulous cloudy being but rather an entity of great physical force. The spectre is supposed to be an untrustworthy visitor from the lower realms who betrays those foolish enough to exchange words with it. In local tradition, there is a cautionary tale about a charcoal burner's son who falls victim to its lures and comes to a violent end. What is typical about Scott's treatment of the story is its double framing: a modern party of travellers reacts to a tale belonging to a superstitious local culture; a phenomenon already widely known among scientific observers is revisited as a tale of the supernatural. Scott makes no attempt to reconcile these contradictory frames of reference but ensures that the framework of rational modernity will dispel any vestiges of credibility attached to 'a very trumpery and ridiculous legend' (p. 251).

It would be easy to conclude that this narrative marks a point at which the Brocken spectre has crossed over firmly into the realms of science. David Brewster, an Edinburgh physicist with special interest in optics and consciousness, revisited the Brocken case in his *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832), a volume publicly addressed to Walter Scott. Brewster, a Fellow of the Royal Society, avows his commitment to promoting social emancipation from the impostures of priests and magicians in the Dark Ages. He was what we would today call a myth-buster and is in a position to offer technical accounts of

<sup>9</sup> 'Constancy to an Ideal Object', in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Complete Poems*, ed. by William Keach (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 284, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. by Nicola J. Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 239.

cause and effect in relation to phenomena arising from ‘the delusions which the mind practices upon itself’ or are induced by ‘the dexterity and science of others’. The letters offer exposés of a range of phenomena including hanging daggers, portraits with moving eyes, strange presences in the mirror, and ‘the spectre of a coach and four filled with skeletons’.<sup>11</sup> In each case, an immaterial phantom is translated into a phenomenon in the material world. As embodied witnesses, we see them anew in a way that should ground us again in the real. Though the real is increasingly uncertain ground.

The Brocken spectre, according to Brewster, is among those cases that ‘still retain their primitive importance’, and he summarizes a range of accounts in which versions of the illusion have been documented — in the Harz mountains, the Welsh hills, and elsewhere — going back to the mid-eighteenth century (p. 198). Then he introduces a paradox: the only records we have of this kind of spectral illusion are from educated observers whose scientific interests prompted them to make a record, and then to return for repeat sightings to confirm their impressions. There are no documentary accounts from folklore and no recorded observations prior to those he cites from the previous century; even these often failed to find a place in official records of natural phenomena because, in the absence of any scientific account of the causes, the witnesses were treated with suspicion, and dismissed as victims of credulity (Brewster, p. 203).

In a recent historical review of the literature on the Brocken spectre, Sebastian Mitchell summarizes the implications. The spectre is, he says, ‘an essentially modern phenomenon, and its divine and supernatural attributes only became apparent at the same time as its scientific observation’.<sup>12</sup> Mitchell extends this hypothesis to suggest that the most compelling literary evocations in the nineteenth century — De Quincey’s in *Suspiria* and James Hogg’s in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) — represent a new form of cognitive hybridity.

Hogg’s novel is a Calvinist tale of two brothers, one of whom is a Cain figure who haunts the other as a doppelgänger. Early on in the narrative, the haunted brother George walks up to the peak known as ‘Arthur’s Seat’ on the mountain behind Edinburgh, where he has a vision of his brother’s face, ‘dilated to twenty times its natural size’, its contours etched by the furrows of the ravines.<sup>13</sup> In Mitchell’s reading, Hogg’s rendition of the uncanny is a conjunction of rational and supernatural frames of reference and is exemplary of the novel’s capacity ‘to place incompatible

<sup>11</sup> David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic*, new edn (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Sebastian Mitchell, ‘Dark Interpreter: Literary Uses of the Brocken Spectre from Coleridge to Pynchon’, *Dalhousie Review*, 87 (2007), 167–87 (p. 171).

<sup>13</sup> James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), p. 46.

interpretative modes next to one another' (Mitchell, p. 176). Hogg knew Brewster, Mitchell notes, and the narrator's scientific reflections on the optical illusion may be influenced by Brewster's explanations. Michelle Faubert takes issue with this reading in an essay that emphasizes Hogg's commitment to the uncanny and relates this to the valorization of the irrational over the scientific in John Ferriar's treatise. According to Faubert, Hogg takes care to guide the reader's responses by managing the scientific framework of interpretation so that it is subordinated, introduced as a fragmented counterpoint to the overwhelming imaginative force of the scene as it is experienced by the protagonist. Faubert also notes that, although Hogg may have known Brewster, Hogg's novel precedes Brewster's published account of the Brocken spectre.<sup>14</sup>

This disagreement in recent critical readings points to a major complexity in retrospective attempts to understand the continuing — indeed escalating — currency of the uncanny through the course of the nineteenth century, when the tenure of scientific rationalism was well established in the earlier phase of the Romantic period. Disparate views converge on the case of the Brocken spectre now, just as they did in the literature of the period. Are we really looking at an instance of the perceptual alternator, exemplified in Louis Albert Necker's 1832 model of the ambiguous geometric form? Necker's cube is a diagram that can be 'read' so that the left-hand corner is either at the inner back or the outer front of the form. The axis can shift from one view to the other in the brain of the observer, but it is not cognitively possible to see it both ways at once.<sup>15</sup> Mitchell is suggesting something less clinically definitive, an entanglement of rational and supernatural thoughts, and De Quincey is drawn to such entanglements. While Necker adopts the classic experimental technique of stripping back the test conditions so as to focus sharply on a single instance, De Quincey's idea of experiment is to work the opposite way, multiplying the frames of mind at every turn.

### Supernatural enactments

De Quincey refers to Brewster's account of the Brocken spectre in an extensive footnote, with no indication that there is any tension between the explanatory scientific approach and his own visionary evocations. In the main text, he plays the narrator as stage manager, first setting the scene

<sup>14</sup> Michelle Faubert, 'John Ferriar's Psychology, James Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and the Gay Science of Horror Writing', in *Romanticism and Pleasure*, ed. by Thomas Schmid and Michelle Faubert (London: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 83–108.

<sup>15</sup> L. A. Necker, 'Observations on Some Remarkable Optical Phenomena Seen in Switzerland', *London and Edinburgh Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science*, 3rd ser., 1 (1832), 329–37.

with its atmospheric airs and lights, then heralding the spectacle with allusions to its celebrity and its universal fascination. ‘Who and what is he?’. We are in the theatre of magic and conjuring, where the spectator may be invited to take an active role. ‘Now, in order to test the nature of this mysterious apparition, we will try two or three experiments upon him’ (De Quincey, pp. 160–61). These are experiments in mimesis that return the focus to the human body. The spectre’s propensity to replicate the actions of the observer has been the crux of the experience since Haue’s first account of how, just as he was confronted with the monstrous phantom of the Harz mountains, he had to hang onto his hat in a gust of wind, and the giant in the clouds did the same. That was the moment at which any passing intimations of the supernatural were dispelled. But De Quincey is not interested in setting up some tiebreaking confrontation between the supernatural and the scientific. He is at ease with the spectre’s status as a phantasm and wants to explore what it may yet incorporate from the different kinds of fantasy projected upon it through the ages.

The experiments he proposes are, first, to see if it can be made to repeat a sign of the cross, to prove that its heart is no longer corrupted with ‘dark idolatries’; second, to place an anemone upon the pagan altar where ancient sacrifices were made and say a prayer declaring a changed spiritual allegiance; and third, to recall an inner experience of grief and loss then veil the head ‘in memory of that transcendent woe’ (De Quincey, p. 162). These acts of mimesis on the part of the spectre move from the simple mirroring of gesture to a reflection of interior states of mind and spirit. It is in the realms of the mind, and the unfathomed mysteries of the human psyche, that De Quincey discovers a third dimension for responses to the Brocken spectre. On this psychological terrain, there is no need for deciding between the radical alternatives of supernatural visitation and human delusion.

All the potency of the uncanny resides in the experience of illusion itself, as Hogg also understands. Before his encounter with the giant on the mountain, Hogg’s protagonist George is already portrayed as a character in a state of intense paranoia, haunted by a mimetic doppelgänger who follows him everywhere and knows ‘all his motions, and every intention of his heart, as it were[,] intuitively’ (Hogg, p. 42). As with De Quincey’s experiment, there is a seamless transition from outward mimicry to a kind of possession, in which the spectre comes to inhabit thought processes and mood states. And when it comes to this interior mirroring, the question then looms large: which of the two entities is taking the lead and setting the conditions of mental life? Hogg approaches the scene of the spectral vision by establishing a bipolar mood. George climbs to the heights in a state of euphoria, surrounded by the sparkling morning air as the early rays of the sun illuminate the landscape. The vision, with its ‘dark and malevolent looks’ composed from massive patterns of shadow, causes an immediate swing to the opposite end of the spectrum (p. 46).



Such indulgences in visionary phantasm may seem to be in denial of the scientific awareness being widely articulated at the time Hogg was writing. In Ferriar's terms, it might rather be construed as a form of imaginative licence justified by the compelling popular appeal of the frisson, though something more is involved here than the willing suspension of disbelief. As the domain of psychology opens up, offering a whole new range of obscurities and sinister potential, the uncanny is recuperated as that which, as Freud was to say in his essay of 1919, is most secretly familiar. The paradox of the familiar-unknown presents a mental conundrum much less sharply defined than the cognitive oscillator of the Necker cube, one that is explored through mimetic experiment rather than passive observation. Enactment becomes the primary means of recuperation. The body as well as the brain is involved in the process of cognitive assimilation.

Henry Irving, actor-manager at the Lyceum Theatre in London for three decades from 1871, built his career as a virtuoso of the uncanny. A scene featuring Walpurgisnacht on the Brocken mountain was the *pièce de resistance* in his production of Goethe's *Faust*. Irving exploited all his aesthetic and technological resources to conjure a supernatural vision. Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell, influential art critics of the time, described it for *Century Magazine*:

There is nothing more powerful than this single scene — one minute a wild shrieking, singing crowd of misty shapes, moving hither and thither, clambering over the rocks and up the trees, dancing and turning; the next, after one last shriek, wilder, shriller than the rest, a silent, storm-beaten mountain-top deserted but for one flaming form.<sup>16</sup>

The 'one flaming form' was Irving himself as Mephistopheles, surrounded by an aura of lightning flashes created by firing lycopodium powder.

Releasing selected details of such technological tricks was part of the publicity strategy at the Lyceum. As Sarah Kriger suggests in a recent study of nineteenth-century stage magic, Irving 'purposely de-constructed the aura of mystery surrounding the effect by sharing the explanation of its production'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while Irving was seducing his audience with all the thrills of demonic spectacle, he was also inviting them to understand the effects as illusory and to be aware of the technical means by which they were effected. Yet, while he was at ease with allowing his audience to see

<sup>16</sup> Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell, 'Pictorial Successes of Irving's *Faust*', *Century Magazine*, December 1887, pp. 309–13 (p. 311).

<sup>17</sup> Sarah Kriger, 'Fighting Ghosts, Playing Whist, and Fencing with Fire: Three Technologies of Illusion in Performance in Nineteenth-Century London' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, University of Toronto, 2012), p. 223.

the artifice of his theatrical devices, he had uncanny potency as an actor. Intimations of the supernatural arose through Irving's propensity to give physical expression to the deeper and darker reaches of the psyche in ways that produced an extraordinary mesmeric hold over audiences. He came under some criticism for his role in *Faust* because some of his strongest admirers felt he had stepped too far into the realms of the Gothic and failed to capture the interior tensions of Faust's human struggle.<sup>18</sup>

It was unusual for Irving to incur this kind of judgement. As an actor-manager with equal responsibilities for performing and staging a production, his success depended on a complex balancing act that could enable him to maintain an objective control over the unfolding of a scene while occupying the stage himself as the compelling presence at the centre of the drama. If *Faust* lacked gravity on the latter side of the equation, it was perhaps because the role of Mephistopheles did not provide Irving with the scope for psychological naturalism that he was able to find in his most effective performances. When the performative and scenic modes of communication worked in perfect synergy, as in Leopold Lewis's *The Bells* (premiered in 1871), with Irving in his signature role as the guilt-ridden Mathias, the effect was electrifying in much more than any technical sense.

Eric Jones-Evans, who saw *The Bells* on tour at Boscombe in 1905 when he was a child, claims he retained near-total recall of the performance into adulthood. The opening scene of an old inn parlour radiating 'cosy genial warmth and homeliness', with its red-curtained window looking out onto the dusk of a winter evening, is already haunted by the shadowy figure moving past in falling snow outside. A sound of rising wind contributes to the sense of premonition.<sup>19</sup> In Freudian terms, Irving is engineering a psychological transition from the *heimliche* (homely/familiar) to the *unheimliche* (uncanny).

Another key aspect of the psychological manipulation was a transition in focus from the whole scenic picture — contrived, as it was, with a painter's eye for grand composition — to a minute detail in the actor's performance, as he painstakingly removed a speck of floating cork from the wine in a glass or leant over to pick up coal with the tongs, so that his face was illuminated by the firelight (Jones-Evans, p. 14). The great theatre director Edward Gordon Craig, who at the start of his career served as Irving's assistant, recalls the effect as he stopped in the act of buckling his shoe. Suddenly, the fingers went limp, 'the crown of the head seemed to glitter and become frozen — and then, at the pace of the slowest and most terrified snail, the two hands, still motionless and dead, were seen

<sup>18</sup> Walter Herries Pollock, *Impressions of Henry Irving, Gathered in Public and Private During a Friendship of Many Years* (London: Longmans, 1908), pp. 39–40.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Jones-Evans, 'With Irving and *The Bells*: A Memoir', in *Henry Irving and 'The Bells'*, ed. by David Mayer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 17–30 (p. 19).

coming up the side of the leg.’<sup>20</sup> Such minute control over the attention of the audience had far more impact than all the stage tricks for evoking the supernatural that were at Irving’s disposal. His contemporaries John Nevil Maskelyne and George Cooke staged popular entertainments at the Egyptian Hall involving transparent veils, elongated traps with subfloor ramps, angled mirrors, and swivelling cabinets; but these purely visual illusions had none of the dramatic power Irving conjured on the stage.

The contrast between Maskelyne and Cooke’s supernaturalist pantomime and Irving’s Gothic theatre hinges on Irving’s much deeper understanding of how an audience can be drawn into uncanny experience through mimesis. Those who observed him closely commented on his extraordinary capacity to engage and intensify concentration. The portrait artist Mortimer Menpes, who made numerous sketches of Irving during the later 1890s, found his own skills in observation acutely sharpened by this subject: ‘During the first sitting, Sir Henry scarcely moved his body at all; but his face was alive with movement. [...] I have never seen a face change so much.’<sup>21</sup> And when he spoke, ‘you could almost see his mind at work behind the slow and strangely weighted words.’ Nothing was common to Irving, Menpes remarked. Everything was significant, or, rather, became so under the microscopic lens through which he directed attention (pp. 42–43). Jones-Evans stresses Irving’s concern with timing and describes him ‘playing a waiting game with his audiences, pausing, hesitating, pursuing minute pieces of stage business’, so that each of these drawn-out moments led up to ‘the abruptly terrifying lifting of a mental barrier to expose a depth of authentic panic or horror or revulsion beyond the capacity of other actors to express’ (Jones-Evans, p. 14). In lifting the mental barrier, Irving created a telepathic effect so that spectators felt they were party to his thought processes, changing moods, and sudden, stark reactions.

Gordon Craig’s description of how Irving could create a literally showstopping moment as he paused in the act of buckling a shoe conveys the sense of how an individual audience member might be drawn in as a virtual collaborator in the performance. There was nothing delusory about this sense. What Irving was doing might, in his own time, have been construed as a form of scientific experiment, beginning with an induction of the state of hyperalertness that Edmund Gurney identified as the first phase of hypnosis. Gurney, who has been called ‘the first full time psychological researcher in history’, conducted wide-ranging surveys in his search for empirical evidence of hallucinogenic and telepathic experience among ‘sane’ human subjects.<sup>22</sup> While the experience of Irving’s audiences may

<sup>20</sup> Edward Gordon Craig, *Henry Irving* (London: Dent, 1930), p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Mortimer Menpes, *Henry Irving* (London: Black, 1906), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Andreas Sommer, ‘Professional Heresy: Edmund Gurney (1847–88) and the Study of Hallucinations and Hypnotism’, *Medical History*, 55 (2011), 383–88 (p. 383).

have been empathic rather than telepathic, there was certainly a hallucinogenic element, and a sense that he was undertaking a form of self-hypnosis that was contagious.

There was a psychophysiological element to this contagion, in that the attention of spectators was directed towards a minute involvement with bodily actions. They were engaged in a hyperintensive process of reading and replicating the body on stage. Late twentieth-century research into mirror neurons has tracked the cognitive pathways through which specific actions may be replicated in the mind of an observer, and this has led to further experiments on how intention and reaction may also be replicated. Giacomo Rizzolatti, one of the original team responsible for the identification of mirror neurons in 1992, has more recently speculated on their relevance to how we ‘read’ the thoughts and feelings associated with an action.<sup>23</sup> This research presents a subtle but significant corrective to the dualistic view of scientific observation as the antithesis of imaginative interpretation, a view articulated with some force and persistence during the Victorian era by William Whewell, president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The scientific observer, according to Whewell,

allows no natural yearning for the offspring of his own mind to draw him aside from the higher duty of loyalty to his sovereign, Truth: to her he not only gives his affections and his wishes, but strenuous labour and scrupulous minuteness of attention.<sup>24</sup>

Irving himself was surely breaking down this distinction. Unlike the spiritualists, he was not suggesting to the audiences that they might be witnessing the manifestation of a ghostly or demonic presence. The dimension of the uncanny in Irving’s performances derived its potency from the creation of an intense psychological affinity between actor and spectator.

Bram Stoker, Irving’s business partner, was treated to a private performance when the two men met for the first time in a hotel drawing room in 1876. Irving proposed an after-dinner recitation of Thomas Hood’s poem ‘The Dream of Eugene Aram’. As the performance got under way, Stoker recalls, the surroundings vanished and the actor in his dinner suit conjured up the accursed spirit of Aram, ‘as the ghost in his brain seemed to take external shape before his eyes’. The ‘incarnate power, incarnate passion’ by which Irving seemed possessed left the actor afterwards in a state

<sup>23</sup> G. di Pellegrino and others, ‘Understanding Motor Events: A Neurophysiological Study’, *Experimental Brain Research*, 91 (1992), 176–80; Lea Winerman, ‘The Mind’s Mirror’, *Monitor on Psychology*, 36.9 (2005), p. 48 <<http://www.apa.org/monitor/octo5/mirror.aspx>> [accessed 14 February 2017].

<sup>24</sup> William Whewell, *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, 2 vols (London: Parker, 1847), II, 57.

of collapse. As for Stoker — by his own insistence ‘a very strong man’ with advanced professional experience in the Civil Service — he was stunned for a few moments then ‘burst into something like a violent fit of hysterics’.<sup>25</sup> Stoker is not suggesting for a moment that he felt he had seen a ghost. What he had witnessed was an exhibition of something he chose to call ‘genius’, itself a phenomenon outside the range of any prior experience to which he had been exposed. And the effect was achieved, as Stoker emphasizes, without any of the apparatus of theatrical illusion.

Irving did not need smoke and mirrors to conjure the demons of the mind that held his audience in thrall, and for their part, audiences required no naive beliefs in the supernatural to induce the heart-stopping and spine-chilling sensations that were the highlight of their theatrical experience. They might have arrived at the theatre knowing in advance about some of the most inventive technologies of scene making, and departed fully cognizant of having participated in an entirely human form of contrivance, and yet they were left with the enduring impression of having experienced something outside the parameters of their understanding.

### Double consciousness

The mirroring relationship between stage and auditorium was given literal expression with the installation of a reflecting curtain at the Royal Coburg Theatre in London in 1822. This was advertised on playbills as a featured spectacle in its own right. Isobel Armstrong discusses the cultural significance of the extravagant construction, which was designed to allow the audience to view themselves as spectacle, with all their fashions and gestures and rituals of social acknowledgement. But the apparatus was unwieldy, comprised of multiple panels with an aggregate weight of five tons and almost impossible to keep clean. And audiences, it seems, had a limited interest in seeing their own image in the theatre, especially when it was marred by stains and smudges.<sup>26</sup>

Irving’s mimetic relationship with spectators was founded by contrast in a deeply internalized process of mirroring, in which the consciousness of any individual audience member could become a sensory and emotional echo chamber, resonating from the furthest reaches of the psyche. Tiffany Watt Smith extends Armstrong’s commentary to suggest that theatre audiences more generally developed a mode of self-consciousness that included awareness of their own role as reflectors of the emotional

<sup>25</sup> Bram Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 98–99.

landscape drawn by the actors. Watt Smith emphasizes how the worlds of Victorian science and theatre were ‘intimately entwined’.<sup>27</sup> While in theory the theatrical audiences who ‘flinched and cringed, pointed, laughed and gawked’ were the antithesis of the impassive scientific observer, scientific attempts to study emotional reactions often involved the scientist as demonstrator (Watt Smith, pp. 24–25).

Charles Darwin’s *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) included photographic illustrations for which the celebrated neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne had manipulated the facial muscles of his patients. Other examples were set up by photographer Oscar Rejlander, who himself performed the requisite emotional state for the camera. Although Rejlander’s stereotyped mugging of contempt, disgust, surprise, and guilt may look embarrassingly fake to us now, Darwin wrote detailed commentary on what he took to be accurate renditions of the particular physiological manifestations associated with each state.<sup>28</sup>

Rejlander made no attempt to experience the emotional states he is endeavouring to replicate, but an actor of Irving’s intelligence would have understood that an attempt to isolate the external and physiological signals of an emotion would necessarily appear false. What Irving conveyed, above all, was an impression of someone going through an inner experience. *The Times*’s critic described his performance in *The Bells* as inhabiting two worlds ‘between which there is no link — an outer world that is ever smiling, an inner world which is purgatory’.<sup>29</sup> This view of inner experience as a second world also acknowledges the psychological dimensions of the performance as equivalent in scale and significance to those of the material world. The actor, like the scientist, then, makes emotional states an object of study, but the actor goes a stage further, as an explorer who enters and inhabits the psychological terrain.

The spectator who follows may do so in the first instance in a state of virtual hypnosis, but the most striking contemporary testimonies to Irving’s impact as a performer come from spectators who subsequently reflect back on the experience and seek to understand it in rational terms. In Stoker’s case, for example, the two states of mind — that of his near-hysterical involvement in Irving’s recitation of ‘Eugene Aram’ and that of objective reflection upon it — are separated in time, but Watt Smith’s enquiry into the changing psychology of spectatorship during the Victorian era suggests that audiences in general were becoming more aware of and

<sup>27</sup> Tiffany Watt Smith, *On Flinching: Theatricality and Scientific Looking from Darwin to Shell Shock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. by Paul Ekman (London: Harper Collins, 1998), chapters 11 and 12.

<sup>29</sup> John Oxenford, review of *The Bells*, in *The Times*, 27 November 1871, quoted in Charles Hiatt, *Henry Irving: A Record and Review* (London: Bell, 1899), p. 102.

interested in their own sensations during the course of a theatrical performance. Something akin to the ‘double consciousness’ that Irving regarded as essential to the art of the actor was also at work in the spectator.

In a preface to Diderot’s *The Paradox of Acting*, Irving defined this state of double consciousness as one ‘in which all the emotions proper to the situation may have full sway, while the actor is all the time on the alert for every detail of his method’.<sup>30</sup> This, Irving argued, was the paradox that Diderot was unable to tolerate. *The Paradox of Acting* thus became a treatise on the necessity of excluding sensibility altogether: the actor must undergo a ‘strange parting of self from self’ in order to render the signifiers of an extreme state of passion while maintaining an overarching conscious control (Diderot, p. 24).

In Diderot’s account, the actor is engaged in a process akin to that of Rejlander as he created the photographic poses to illustrate Darwin’s book: ‘He has learned before a mirror every particle of his despair’ and ‘all this is pure mimicry, magnificent aping’ (Diderot, p. 16). A second and unacknowledged paradox emerges from this line of analysis, for while the actor is engaged in a display of purely external signs, devoid of inner life, the spectator is drawn into a fully immersive experience. Diderot cites the moment when the great actor Lekain, as Ninias, enters his father’s tomb to cut his mother’s throat: ‘He is horror-stricken; his limbs tremble, his eyes roll wildly, his hair stands on end. So does yours to see him; terror seizes you, you are as lost as he is’ (pp. 47–48). Yet Lekain is not lost. For, at this very moment, he is able to spot a fallen earring on the stage and deftly flick it out of his way. In Diderot’s example, the mirror neurons are at work in an asymmetrical way. The actor wears all the outer appearance of the passion in pure artifice, while the spectator goes through the inward experience as if it were real.

However it is modelled, Diderot’s paradox is an example of Necker’s cognitive oscillator, switching between mutually exclusive states of consciousness. Irving makes the case for their coexistence. The difference between their views of what is possible is easy to account for: Diderot makes his case on the basis of a reasoned hypothesis, while Irving is speaking from experience of how the duality can be sustained in actor and audience alike. Jones-Evans’s description of how Irving sharpened the level of attention through minute, drawn-out pieces of stage business suggests that there were quite particular techniques involved, and that these had the effect of expanding the psychological dimensions of the experience. In ‘lifting the mental barrier’ to expose hitherto unexplored depths of feeling, he was creating an enlarged space, opening onto areas that were both dangerous and strange to modern consciousness.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Henry Irving, preface to Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. by Walter Herries Pollock (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), pp. ix–xx (pp. xv–xvi).

<sup>31</sup> David Mayer, ‘Introduction’, in *Henry Irving and ‘The Bells’*, ed. by Mayer, pp. 1–16 (p. 14).

George Henry Lewes engaged with Diderot's views in his own treatise *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (1875), taking a line very similar to Irving's: the actor must inhabit the passions while also maintaining some conscious steerage over their expression and interpretation. But Lewes, one of the most insightful observers of acting technique, drew specific attention to the question of legibility. If passion was to be communicated, the audience must be able to read it. He admired Edmund Kean's capacity to express emotion not just in its surges, but also in its subsiding moments when 'there remains the groundswell troubling the deeps'. The voice regained its calm, but the reverberating tremor was still present, while the face showed 'vanishing traces of the recent agitation'.<sup>32</sup> Such nuanced signalling surely required some mimetic instinct in the audience and a capacity to replicate the dual controls at work in the actor.

Several works of recent scholarship have traced the term 'double consciousness' back to an article by Samuel L. Mitchell published in 1817, in which the term is glossed as 'a duality of person in the same individual'.<sup>33</sup> But the idea had already been introduced by students of Franz Mesmer in the 1780s. The Marquis de Puységur alluded in his *Memoirs* (1784) to the manifestation of a second consciousness in the trance state brought on under the mesmerist's quasi-supernatural powers.<sup>34</sup>

Techniques of mesmerism began to acquire a new kind of medical legitimacy in the late 1830s when John Elliotson, a professor of medicine at the University of London, began to take an interest in the application of French theories of animal magnetism to the treatment of female patients with nervous disorders. His work with one particularly susceptible patient, a 16-year-old named Elizabeth O'Key, was documented in the *Lancet* over a period of eighteen months. During the course of her treatment, O'Key displayed increasing virtuosity as an entertainer, to the extent that the *Lancet* reporter became convinced that it was she, rather than Elliotson, who was in control of the behavioural display. The implications of this are cogently explored by Amy Lehman in *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance*, in the context of a study tracking the cultural significance of female performance in a liminal terrain between spirit possession, hypnotically induced automatism, and theatrical acting. Lehman focuses on a turning point in the *Lancet* accounts, when the reporter credits O'Key with a talent for mimesis amounting to genius and describes the effect of her 'dark piercing eye' on

<sup>32</sup> George Henry Lewes, *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel L. Mitchell, 'A Double Consciousness, or a Duality of Person in the Same Individual', *Medical Repository*, 3 (1817), 185–86, quoted in Amy Lehman, *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists and Mesmerists in Performance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> See Tim Bayne, *The Unity of Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 173.



observers. 'Although the reporter was deliberately debunking mesmerism,' Lehman comments, 'he resorted to the concept of a mysterious power, possibly emanating from the eyes (as Mesmer had claimed it could) to describe O'Key's influence' (p. 53).

In her ensuing chapter, Lehman goes on to discuss how the concept of double consciousness came to the fore in acting theory and in the clinical literature on hypnosis. The importance of the term in both domains raises questions of interpretation that are worth revisiting in relation, specifically, to the imaginative tradition of the uncanny double. For, despite all the assaults upon it from the domains of science and reason, the figure of the *doppelgänger* reached the *fin de siècle* undiminished, with compelling manifestations in Irving's production of *The Corsican Brothers* (1880), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and, if we accept the case that the vampire count is Bram Stoker's rendition of Henry Irving's alter ego, *Dracula* (1897).

The trance subject was at the centre of a paradigm shift from the supernatural to the psychological in late-Victorian culture. Ideas of spirit possession were not so much dropped as repositioned as psychological phenomena, so that the realms of psychology began to accommodate a new kind of supernaturalism, as the stranger within became a charismatic presence endowed with an aura of mystery and terror. To an extent, this shift may be traced through the increasingly complex terms in which clinical psychologists envisaged the structures of the mind. Anatomical work on the hemispheres of the brain suggested that the operations of the mind might also tend towards a bipartite model that would seem to corroborate the claims of hypnotists like Elliotson. Elliotson's work came into disrepute and he lost his university position following the denunciation of the O'Key experiments in the *Lancet*, but he continued to speak and write on the theme of mental structures, essentially adhering to a dualistic view of the mind and arguing for the coexistence of distinct personalities and states of consciousness, even in healthy individuals.

The bipartite model was also advanced by Théodule Ribot, who taught psychology at the Sorbonne and used hypnosis as an experimental method for the study of psychological conditions characterized by 'alternating conscious personalities', each with its own store of memories. As an evolutionist influenced by Herbert Spencer and T. H. Huxley, Ribot treated memory as 'per se, a biological fact', and insisted that its foundations must be looked for 'in the properties of organic matter and nowhere else'.<sup>35</sup> Dualities of mind and consciousness must therefore have their origins in physiological divisions of the brain and nervous system.

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<sup>35</sup> Théodule Ribot, *Diseases of Memory: An Essay in the Positive Psychology*, trans. by William Huntingdon Smith (New York: Appleton, 1887), pp. 10, 12.

Ribot's views were developed by Alfred Binet in his work with patients under hypnosis at La Salpêtrière. Binet praised Ribot for having 'constantly endeavoured to stand upon the groundwork of facts', but also challenged his inference that the alternating personalities were a symptom of radical dissociation.<sup>36</sup> Throwing the doors of speculation wide open with the premise that 'we know absolutely nothing regarding the nature of unconscious phenomena', Binet accepted the duality but interested himself explicitly in 'the study of the mental relations existing between these separate consciousnesses' and 'the influences that one of the consciousnesses exerts upon the other' (pp. 11, 19). During this exchange of influence, one personality and then the other may assume the initiative, in a shifting pattern of dominance. The phenomenon of spirit possession might, in these terms, be subject to scientific demystification, and transposed to a paradigm of nervous debility. The hysteric subject, Binet affirms, is an exhausted subject, whose nervous weakness manifests in a failure to correlate sensations and impressions so that they get sorted across a divided consciousness (p. 67).

Pierre Janet, Binet's colleague at La Salpêtrière, suggested that the field of consciousness was retrenched in conditions of nervous debility. Ideas and impressions became isolated, associations were lost and thought processes were disjointed. This state was characterized by 'a certain moral weakness consisting in the reduction of the number of psychological phenomena that can be simultaneously assembled in the same consciousness'.<sup>37</sup> Janet went so far as to posit that a kind of tunnel vision in consciousness was one of the defining symptoms in hysteric patients. Given his special interest in cases presenting as spirit possession, this hypothesis served to demystify an apparently uncanny phenomenon by also shrinking the sphere of interpretation applied to it.

From Binet to Janet we see a transition from an image of see-saw binarism to one of centrifugal/centripetal shifts in focus. George Henry Lewes, with a medical training and sophisticated interests in literature and theatre, writes with a greater consciousness of metaphor and seeks to use it to push the boundaries of contemporary thinking about the structure and operations of consciousness. Lewes begins with the proposition that consciousness is 'seriated', operating like a caravan on the march.<sup>38</sup> This raises the question of 'whether the Mind can carry two disconnected series, each of which has its separate personal implications'. In response to the question, he tries a change of metaphor: perhaps it is better to conceive of

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Binet, *On Double Consciousness: Experimental Psychological Studies* (Chicago: Open Court, 1905), pp. 2–3.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Janet, *Les Névroses* (Paris: Flammarion, 1909), pp. 286–87 (my translation).

<sup>38</sup> George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, 3rd ser. (London: Trübner, 1879), pp. 205–06.

mental operations as a web that, like the nervous system, correlates a range of operations, enabling ‘a unity in diversity’ (Lewes, pp. 206–07). Even so, Lewes adheres to the notion of a dual command system that presents itself as a division between the watcher and the watched (p. 217). With this suggestion of a psychodrama of surveillance between the two pilots in the mind of a single individual, he veers towards the imaginative terrain of Hogg’s *Confessions* and evokes the internal world Irving discovered in ‘Eugene Aram’, or in the character of Mathias in *The Bells*.

For Irving the term ‘double consciousness’ implies a capacity to hold distinct states of awareness in a high functioning synchronicity during the course of a performance. But there was another sense in which, as an actor, he explored the dualities of the mind. Mathias and Eugene Aram are Cain figures, haunted by the guilt of a crime buried from the light of consciousness, and thus prone to the kind of hysterical divisions of mentality that were studied at La Salpêtrière. The feeling of being watched, and subject to traumatic discovery, was the basis of the tension Irving generated in his performances — to the extent that, as Stoker testified, it could induce a mimetic state of hysteria in the spectator. How could this artistic phenomenon, and the aura of the uncanny surrounding it, be accounted for in terms of the contemporary debate on the operations of consciousness?

Irving’s widely acknowledged ‘genius’ might be explained as a form of virtuosity in negotiating the complexities of mental structure: a display of moral strength at the other end of the spectrum from the moral weakness Janet claimed to have observed in his patients. But the theatrical experience, as a phenomenon of collective consciousness, called for a mode of interpretation that linked individual with communal structures of mind. Theories of evolution, especially those of the Lamarckian school, brought a massive and troubling new dimension to psychological hypothesis. Just as individual human beings were walking repositories of organic ancestral life, they were also, as Henry Maudsley suggested in an 1886 essay for the *Fortnightly Review*, compilations of ancestral personality traits. Abberley quotes a passage from this, in which Maudsley signals the need for an awareness in the individual of ‘what lies dormant in him, hidden and indiscernible’.<sup>39</sup> Such an awareness confuses the boundaries of the self, as it is laid wide open to forms of determination, memories, and patterns of behaviour from across the deepest reaches of time. Abberley’s focus on the metaphor of recording technologies serves especially to foreground the uncanny resonances, carrying as it does the inference that the modern individual was a medium through which ancestral voices were replayed. Spirit possession was thus not so much banished as reinvented, and in ways that expanded the psychological terrain for literature and theatre. ‘While the

<sup>39</sup> Henry Maudsley, ‘Heredity in Health and Disease’, *Fortnightly Review*, May 1886, pp. 648–59 (pp. 651–52), quoted in Abberley, p. 3.

lives of individuals offered opportunities for new, character-forming experiences, these seemed dwarfed by the hereditary habits they were destined to echo', Abberley comments (p. 5). Many of Irving's signature roles were in dramas that evoked an atavistic sense of fatality, threatening an invasion of the bounded self by strange and overpowering forces.

It is this sense of expansiveness, rather than any supernatural belief, that carries the aura of ghostly frisson surrounding the uncanny double in the later decades of the nineteenth century. The Brocken spectre, echoing the gestures of the human figure in massive forms written upon the clouds, is a gigantic figuration of mimesis. De Quincey envisages the mind as a vast interior space, and the brain itself a theatre in which spectacles 'of more than earthly splendour' are suddenly illuminated (p. 67). In evoking the hallucinations of the Opium Eater, he brings the language of metaphysics into conjunction with images of mechanical and organic function:

And the dreaming organ, in connection with the heart, the eye and the ear, compose the magnificent apparatus which forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life upon the mirrors of the sleeping mind. (p. 82)

The Dark Interpreter conjured into presence in *Suspiria de Profundis* is a guide to all that has been hidden from consciousness in 'the Delphic caves of human life' (De Quincey, p. 151). A writer whose mental experience is largely formed by the hallucinatory influence of opium might not be regarded as the best mediator between the cognitive disciplines of scientific interpretation and the dreamworld of creative invention, yet De Quincey is remarkably prescient in his evocations of the atavistic consciousness, and his pre-Freudian insights into how the mind hides things from itself.